

Test Psychologists - action and craft

Exploring the variety of professional practices in  
Personnel Selection Psychology

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# Test Psychologists - action and craft

Exploring the variety of professional practices in  
Personnel Selection Psychology

Test psychologen - praktijk en expertise  
Verkenning van de verscheidenheid in professioneel handelen  
bij de toepassing van psychologie in personeelselectie  
*(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)*

## Proefschrift

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Door  
Jacqueline Rita Rietveld  
geboren 12 maart 1962,  
te Perth, WA Australië

**Promotor**

Prof. dr. Hugo Letiche, Universiteit voor Humanistiek

**Co-promotor**

Dr. Geoff Lightfoot, University of Leicester

**Beoordelingscommissie**

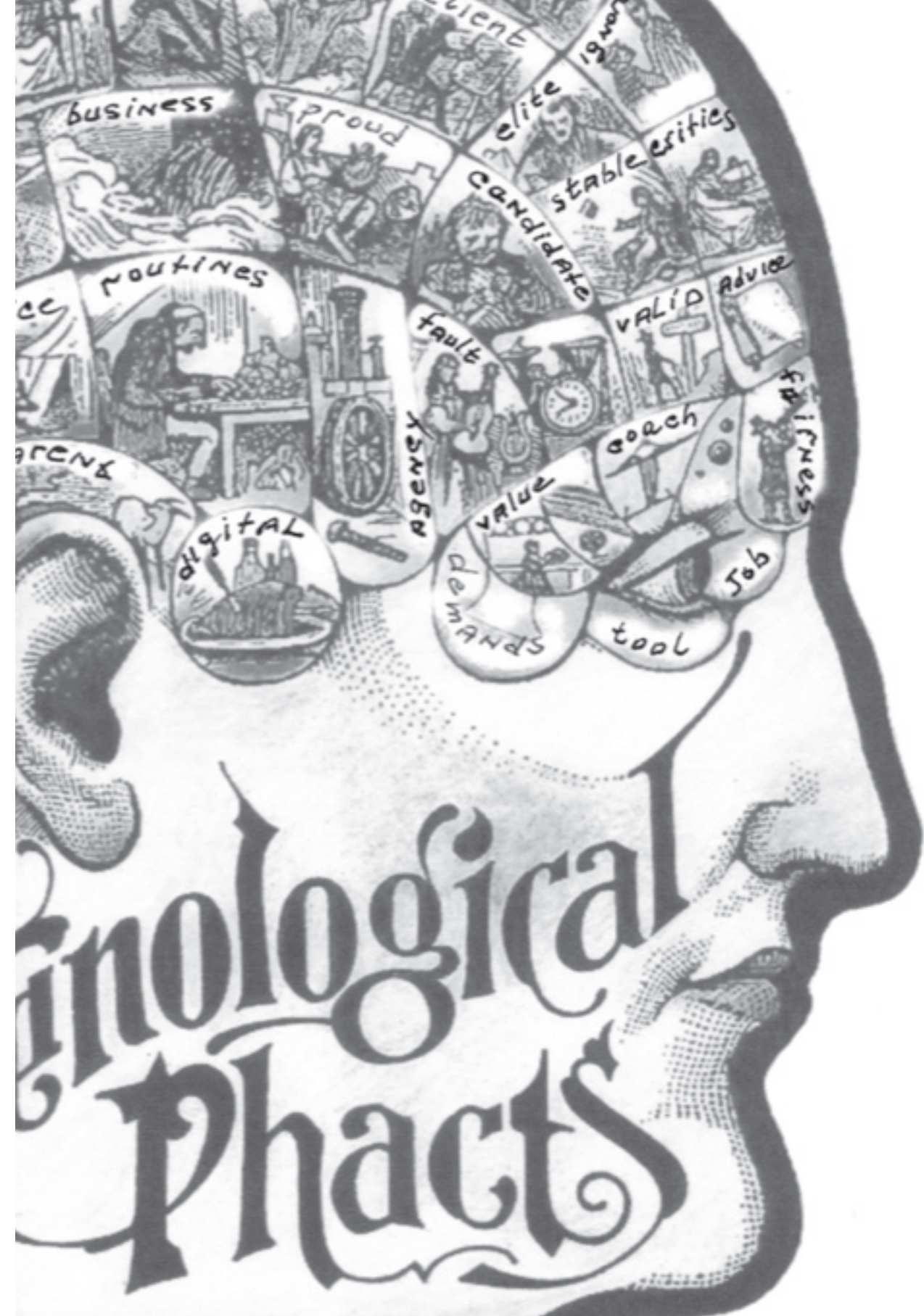
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Prof. dr. Nick Rumens, Middlesex University London

Prof. dr. Simon Lilley, University of Leicester

Prof. dr. Melanie Simms, University of Leicester

Dr. Ruud Kaulingfreks, Universiteit voor Humanistiek



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## Preface

Within the field of psychology, broadly defined as the study of what it is to be a person (Brown & Stenner, 2009:5), test psychology specifically focuses on the standardized measurement or reproduction of personal qualities like intelligence, competencies, and personality traits for job and education allocations. Test psychology can be labeled as 'useful and practical' technoscience, whose origins date back to the beginning of the twentieth century when psychologists turned away from studying the mind through introspection as method of their 'parent discipline philosophy' because this was not regarded as scientific anymore (Coon, 1993). Similar to the prestigious natural sciences, test psychology started to pursue objectivity, standardization, and the quantification of human qualities. The focus steered towards overt and observable symptoms of the mind<sup>1</sup> (like initial reaction time, perception, and memory), allowing the development of standardized methodologies and even laboratory apparatuses to quantify behavior (Ferrari, 2010). The paradigm of current test psychology still strongly focuses on the methodology and objectivity that establishes the practitioners' professional status and differentiates them from nonprofessionals. The clear message I received in the eighties as a student of Industrial Psychology at a predominantly positivistic Dutch university was that one had to commit oneself to the protocols of the dominant empirical-statistical principles of psychometrics in order to guarantee scientific objectivity and generalization--a message that can still be found in the current study books which I teach my students at a professional university (Verhoeven 2014, Ter Laak 2011, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede 2008, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006). In my later practice as a test psychologist, it was therefore rather confusing when an employer asked for my assistance in a renewed selection case due to a rather informal and vague warning I had given on my way out of his office (that later turned out to be true, as the otherwise suitable applicant was caught stealing and immediately fired). Frankly, my subjective mistrust was not verified by any of the assessment results and was purely based on the slightly irritating and intimidating attitude of the candidate in the interview room, which aroused in me a feeling of distrust for just a short moment. It appeared that tests and assessment assignments--which are such decisive tools for the test psychologist--failed to identify what was really important for the employer, who was in search of other information than what the professional tools provided. It was rather dispiriting to learn that despite all of the meticulously applied psychometric principles--for which employers pay a considerable amount of money, and which takes many

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<sup>1</sup> Just like the eighteenth century frenological idea that bulges in the skull represented skills and traits as the result of differences in the parts of the brain, which was taken as science at that time but is now fully obsolete (Kouwer, 1979).

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years of professional training--I was appreciated mostly for my subjective opinion instead of for my 'scientific' assessments. It seems that even a straightforward test psychologist fails to adhere to statistical-empirical formulae alone, and adds something subjective and intangible to the decision-making process (Ter Laak, 2011). This report explores how professionals in test psychology--particularly in the field of Industrial Psychology--apply the positivistic and technocratic paradigm in their rarely studied everyday professional practice. To get a grip on professionalism as it is experienced in real practice also helps to prepare students and increase their understanding of their future careers.

The PhD would not have been possible without the help of several experts in qualitative research. I am therefore very grateful for the relentless supervision of Prof. Dr. Hugo Letiche and Dr. Geoff Lightfoot, who were there from the start in helping me to confront complexity; for the inspiring sessions with Dr. Gabriël Anthonio; and for the constructive advice of Dr. Alexander Grit in the last stretch of my research. Their criticism, idealism, and professionalism were motivating and made the journey very worthwhile. I want to thank the students, colleagues, and managers of the Human Resource Management Department of Stenden University in Leeuwarden and regret not teaching as much during the research process. Many thanks to my fellow personnel selection psychologists, who allowed for a revealing look into their professional practices and who made this research possible. This journey probably followed the 10.000 hours rule of energy and perseverance in the mastering of the craft of researching; and luckily, I was supported throughout by my loved ones and friends--for whom I am grateful too.

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## Introduction

Within the complexity and dynamism of the paradigm shifts in psychology (Abma, 2011), the applied science of test<sup>2</sup> psychology holds a special place--since in this 'well swept corner' of operationalized social science (Geertz, 1973:II), practitioners find 'a rare example of paradigm consensus' (McCourt, 1999:1015). Psycho-diagnostics in test psychology is anchored in positivistic science; and test psychologists (at least Dutch ones) are academically trained in a strictly rationalistic and positivistic paradigm which pursues 'scientific objectivity,'<sup>3</sup> fair study, and career decisions (Deheu, 1995). Due to the consistent and long-lasting paradigm consensus in test psychology, principles and instruments have psychometrically improved yet have hardly changed over the last decades, supplying the practitioner with clear-cut professional standards and a solid professional identity (NIP 2014, Verhoeven 2014, Ter Laak 2011, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede 2008, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006, psychological test guides). Psychometric technology is regarded as essential, constructive, and desirable--since through the standardized administration of psychological tests and assessment<sup>4</sup> techniques, the subjective influence of the expert and others on the process of school and career guidance or of personnel selection advice is tempered (Ter Laak 2011, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede 2008, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006, Hough & Oswald 2000, McCourt 1999, Roe 1999, Iles 1999, De Wolff 1993, Cronbach 1976, Thorndike 1949). Psychometric tools prevail in the classic nomothetic versus ideographic, or statistical versus clinical, debate--which dates back at least sixty years and stems from a different portrayal of mankind in which the clinical humanistic perspective regards a person as being unique and for whom general principles fall short; whereas the starting-point of the statistical notion is that a person is an element of a population characterized by certain qualities which can be assessed through testing (Verhoeven 2014, Ter Laak, De

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<sup>2</sup> A test is a systematic classification or measure procedure (1) which makes it possible to declare a pronouncement about one or more empirical-theoretical based attributes of the assessee (2) (or on specific non-test behavior) on the basis of an objective administration of his or her reactions (3) (in comparison with those of others (4)) to a number of standardized, carefully selected stimuli (5) (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006:67).

<sup>3</sup> The definition of professionalism in test psychology: Acting in a manner that is consistent with the conduct and practices--including, where applicable, a code of ethics--adopted by or associated with the assessment professions; systematic knowledge and proficiency; and being aware of one's limitations and not acting outside of one's area of competence (ISO 10667-2, 2011). Nowadays, a Dutch selection agency still offers 'psycho-technical measurements'--a term introduced in the early 1920's to contrast with the usual oral psychological assessments that did not use 'technical' tests (Gottfredson & Saklofske, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Definition of assessment: a systematic method and procedure for the ascertainment of work-related knowledge, skills, abilities, or other characteristics of an individual or group of individuals, or of the performance of an individual or a group of individuals (IS) 10667-2, 2011).

Goede & De Goede, 2008)<sup>5</sup>. This debate--which is relevant for Industrial Psychology's pursuit of the fair allocation of occupations and educational opportunities for individuals--has unequivocally led over the years to the victory of reliable and valid statistical diagnostics over the expert's subjectivity and intuition (Wood, Garb, Lilienfeld & Nezworski 2002, Grove, Zald, Lebow, Snitz & Nelson 2000, McCourt 1999, Faust 1997, Grove & Meehl 1997, Dawes 1994, Dawes, Faust & Meehl 1993, Faust & Meehl 1989, Hermans 1988, Maas 1988, Meehl 1954); and thus, the paradigm of test psychology strongly relies on objective, empirically-based assessment technology. The statistically oriented test psychologist prefers formulas, with certain probability limitations, based on empirical findings--as is shown by professor and test author Drenth (2000), who advocates in his farewell speech 'Inter Utrumque' (royal way) basing the relationship between all, preferably reliably collected, diagnostic data and future behaviour solely on empirical studies and not on claims or intuition.

Taking the dominance of the unequivocal psychometric and positivistic paradigm consensus into account, it was rather surprising to learn at an informal dinner with fellow test psychologists--all of whom were equally trained in testing at a post-master level some thirty years ago--that divergent opinions and perspectives on tests and the profession emerged.

**Jacqueline:** *Have your perspectives on tests changed over the years?*

**Thomas<sup>6</sup>:** *Well, they're important for our agency since tests open up new markets. A free version of one of our tests is now on a public site for students in order to assist them in their choice of study, and is directly linked to our test for sale.*

**Oliver<sup>7</sup>:** *That sounds good.*

**Hannah<sup>8</sup>:** *By the way, great, you could make it Thomas despite your Society meeting.*

**Kate<sup>9</sup>:** *I think there're by far too little tests approved by our professional association<sup>10</sup>. A lot of tests do not meet up to their criteria. Their ideal picture is difficult to achieve, even for good tests, and still we've got no other choice than to use them. Some tests are often very old, some are ten years old or older!*

**Hannah:** *In my opinion, that doesn't matter since tests are no more than an aid. They're used to start a conversation and must activate movement. I also teach other assessment techniques,*

<sup>5</sup> The psychometric approach assumes that every job consists of a number of discrete tasks, that individuals possess stable attributes, and that the job and the person can be measured independently (McCourt, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas is director of a test agency for school and career guidance and selection.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver is an independent career counselor.

<sup>8</sup> Hannah is a lecturer in psycho-diagnostics at a professional university.

<sup>9</sup> Kate works as a test psychologist at a high school,

<sup>10</sup> The association of test affairs of the Dutch association of psychologists, which accredit quality grants to tests, is called the COTAN (NIP, 2014).

*like hand-drawing or competence games. This is quite a different practice, in which communication is central and tests are only aids.*

**Oliver:** *I sometimes work without any test, and then you take what you observe more seriously.*

**Julian<sup>11</sup>:** *Excuse me, how can you not use tests or use instruments of such poor quality? At the moment a human intervenes, the assessment gets biased. That is generally acknowledged in our discipline. The big advantage of tests is that they're standardized<sup>12</sup>, so you're able to compare individual results and get far more objective information.*

**Thomas:** *You're right. However, the use of personality tests in the context of selection remains an issue. Yet it's better to work with a test than with intuition only; the employer needs tools.*

**Julian:** *In my work, you offer the client tools to choose the right job candidate, from depending on what kind of organization they prefer. I cannot decide on their policy, but I'm hired as the expert and the client expects me to decide whom they're going to hire.*

**Hannah:** *Well, when I worked at a selection agency, we were only allowed to give recommendations ... and even that I considered most distressing, since who am I to give that? At any rate, tests certainly should not!*

**Julian:** *Sometimes you've got to make a decision. You cannot avoid that. That's the way it is for professionals in test psychology.*

**Kate:** *I used to be a sharp antagonist of tests too, because in university workshops we analyzed the assumptions and elaborations of test statistics. Then you discover the relativity of statistics and the choices test authors make, for example about the length of the scale or the acceptable level of reliability<sup>13</sup>. Then you think 'okay, with psychometric analyses you can do everything', like moving an item from one scale to another. When you apply a model, descriptive or confirmative<sup>14</sup>, then you generally find it reasonably fits. With psychometrics you can dim all sort*

<sup>11</sup> Julian works as a personnel selection psychologist at a distinguished test agency.

<sup>12</sup> Definition of standardization in assessments: the extent to which assessment procedures are made upon detailed rules and specifications (including all administrative guidance from the assessment developer) in order to maintain a uniform, constant assessment administrative environments, scoring, and the interpretation of assessment results so that the testing conditions or environments are comparable for all assessment participants taking the same assessment (ISO 10667-2, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> A measurement is reliable when the influence of accidental measurement faults in people, items or context on the result are negligible (Verhoeven, 2011). Reliability is a measure of accuracy. It is said that the true score is within some margin/band with the width of the fault in the measuring. A reliability of 0.8 indicates that 80% of the variance in the scores rest on the true scores of the participants. According to Nunnally & Bernstein (1994), the rule of thumb is that these values have to be above 0.90 for selection purposes. This reliability coefficient is context-related because it is derived from the relationship between true variance and total variance. When the total variance is limited (for example in an extreme or homogenous group), then the reliability is relatively lower. The test users must therefore reconsider the presented coefficients for the group (member) for which they advise.

<sup>14</sup> Descriptive statistics are used to summarize relatively large amounts of units to be analysed into modus, median, mean and spread. Normative statistics enable statements on the population on the basis of data from random samples (Grotenhuis & Weegen, 2013).

of weaknesses. Moreover, personality tests measure at an ordinal level yet some authors use regression analyses requiring higher measurement levels.

**Hannah:** *I only wanted to say that applying tests without any form of discussing the results is not ideal.*

**Julian:** *I disagree, it's possible and it's done in our agency. Our online test reports offer reflection too, which makes it cheaper to use because you don't need face-to-face contact with a professional. I think there's potential in these tests since their results hardly have to be interpreted.*

**Kate:** *I said I used to be an antagonist, but now I consider tests as just a certain viewpoint, and you need to group all the viewpoints. When they fit, I think they provide a valid picture of the individual. I consider the term psycho-diagnostics too heavy; I just make use of test information because it's infrequently used in a school context.*

**Thomas:** *In fact, we are all saying the same thing. Test results are objective data which you must discuss. An intelligence test is rather explicit, but low intelligence can for example be very well compensated by perseverance and conscientiousness.*

**Hannah:** *I actually turned away from psycho-diagnostics. It's important to know and I teach it to my students, though with another focus. When someone thinks a score is invalid, I change it just like that. I'm convinced that a recommendation must be interactively made in communication.*

**Julian:** *Excuse me, again, but you should not be allowed to teach psychometrics. Without tests, you steer towards a certain direction or rely on your first impression. Okay, why bother administering the fuss of tests when they're only used to account for your own biased opinion?*

**Oliver:** *I was recently at the pedicurist who told me that my little toe folds inwards, which means I don't have much self-confidence.*

**Kate:** *Yes, parents at school told me: 'you diagnosed our son as autistic, but that's not true since we looked it up on the internet; he has an attention disorder'.*

**Thomas:** *Everyone tries to diagnose, layman and expert.*

**Julian:** *It's better to wait for more results from brain research, then we'll have really objective data; I'd be really happy with that.*

**Oliver:** *Shall we have dessert?*

What started out as an animated dinner turned into an agitated discussion with surprisingly diverse approaches, beliefs, and seemingly insurmountable opinions. As practitioners in test psychology, we seem to disagree on how and whether or not to use psychometric tools and triangulation<sup>15</sup> in selection judgments, differ in our faith in psychological tests and instrumental hostility, use less-qualified psychometric assess-

ment techniques, meet employers' demands and take responsibility for selection decisions differently, show different approaches for bypassing psychometric flaws, and vary in how the opinion of test candidates is involved in the determination of the final selection recommendation. Possible effects of adjusting or withholding career opportunities for organizations and job applicants remained unspoken as test psychologists primarily strive to accomplish society's wish to 'objectively' judge and control the entrance into an education or career on the basis of personal merits and efforts. The variety of opinions and perspectives coming from my fellow psychologists and myself--all of us trained by the same post-academic program some twenty years ago--kept howling in my ears. This leads to the question of how to interpret the presumed diversity among practicing scientific test psychologists, and what this possibly means for their state of craftsmanship or expertise, which I set out to investigate how personnel selection psychologists perform selections in daily practice.

This report consists of three parts: design, results, and discussion. Part One starts off with methodology and the theoretical framing of this qualitative research, in which interpretative sociology provides the heuristic construction of ideal types as a result of discourse analysis (Jones 2012, Weber 1992). The methodology of ideal types fits the central research question since different and mutual conflicting approaches when conducting personnel selection by practitioners are expected--which can be practically and illustratively presented through individual ideal types. Ideal types facilitate the analysis of the selective, meaningful perceptions and experiences of several respondents (Aronovitch, 2011), and are supported by additional literature studies on relevant concepts such as psychometric theory, professional power and 'good' craftsmanship (Sennett, 2008). In Part Two, the research data--as it is distilled from the discourse analyses of recorded and transcribed in-depth interviews with practitioners about their daily working life--is organized into the presentation of general themes that are subsequently specified and elaborated into four different ideal types. It starts off with a description of the strengths and flaws of the psychometric paradigm in practice as reported by the respondents. Chapter One explores important rules at a societal, professional and individual level for managing professional behaviour and providing for a clear and proud professional identity. Chapter Two discusses flaws in the dominant psychometric paradigm and their confusing yet at times enriching effects on the daily practices of the interviewed personnel selection psychologists. Both chapters produce relevant themes that are present in the practice of test psychologists--such as the persevering pursuit of objectivity, the neglecting or denial of errors, the resistance to too much transparency, relationships with clients and candidates, and a lack of moral accountability resulting from an experienced force field between the strengths and flaws of psychometric theory that seems characteristic of the craft of personnel selection psychology. The next four chapters describe ideal types that represent practical delib-

<sup>15</sup> Triangulation is a fusion of various measurements (Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede, 2005).



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erations, approaches, and attempts by the interviewed experts to come to terms with discrepancies within the dominant scientific paradigm and the daily demands of selection assignments from clients and candidates. Chapter Three starts off with the ideal type the 'selection specialist'--who illustrates how, despite distinctive flaws in the psychometric paradigm, professionals still manage to hold on to their belief in a scientific and objective professional identity. In the next two chapters, the influence of important others, namely clients and candidates, on daily selection processes is explored. In Chapter Four, the ideal type the 'business partner' forms a personification of the manner for dealing with the professionally incompatible demands of respected employers when selecting the best job applicants for them; while the ideal type the 'career counselor' represents the professional's struggle in personnel selection to process empathy for the rejected individual job applicants in Chapter Five. Chapter Six illustrates how the fourth ideal type, the 'Jack of all trades', creatively attempts to synergize all three previous aspects of personnel selection--namely psychometric standards, business interests, and career planning for candidates. At the end of Part Two, in Chapter Seven, the diversity shown in this study in the professional practices of personnel selection psychology as demonstrated by the four ideal types is further analyzed by discussing similarities and differences between them in more detail. Part Three shows how the at times insufficient body of knowledge of the behavioral science of psychometrics within the context of societal, clients' and candidates' expectations and needs gives rise for concern, as well as reflecting on the state of test psychologist craftsmanship. It is asked how the profession could change to both allow test psychologists to perform their selection task while remaining craftsmen, and to solve the professional paradox that they are in.

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## Part 1 Research

The conventional way of conducting research in the social science of Industrial Psychology is to apply statistical techniques on preferably large amounts of data in order to formulate possibility statements about, hopefully causal, relationships between test result and criterion (Grotenhuis & Weegen 2013, Alma 2011, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006). Quantitative research requires substantial numbers of respondents whose reactions to fixed research questions are put into figures. Large-scale data appears to have greater legitimacy than a limited number of case-studies because it is not limited to a particular time and place; it is also more abstract, and homogenizes and de-contextualizes the individual. Randomized controlled trials are an additional highly-valued methodology in most contemporary psychological research (Abma, 2009) but is hardly applied in Industrial Psychology where the core business is to develop and test tools in order to make them more efficient in objectively identifying how the attributes of job applicants best match the requirements of jobs and organizations (Bolander & Sandberg, 2014).

When the research question requires an investigation of how respondents 'interpret their experience, ascribe meaning to various selected elements of it, orient themselves and act' (Aronovith, 2011), as is the case in the current study, a qualitative research methodology seems mostly appropriate (Brohm & Jansen 2012, Hollway & Jefferson 2000). The complexity of real life situations with attentive people in contrast to the inanimate objects of natural sciences, cannot always be captured by objective, quantitative methods (Abma 2009, Deheu 1990, Barendregt 1982, De Groot 1980); and the meaning of behavior cannot be observed or measured by attitude questionnaires since it depends on the accounts of the person studied.

## 1.1 Methodology

Despite an impressive amount of psychometric research published in test guides, journals (De Psycholoog, Journal of Career Assessment, Journal of Management, Public Personnel Management, Applied Psychological Measurement, Human Relations, Psychological Science, Organizational Psychology Review) and academic handbooks (Verhoeven 2014, Ter Laak 2011, Zedeck, 2010, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede 2008, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006, Anderson, Ones, Sinangil & Viswervaran 2005, Ter Laak 2000, Kline 2000), the daily practice of how selection decisions take place in real-life situations is much less studied ethnographically (Bolander & Sandberg 2014, Ter Laak 2011, Zysberg & Nevo, 2004, Hough & Oswald 2000). In general, 'little is known about the actual enactment or implementation of HR practices' (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005:71). Interpretative sociology opens up the possibility of studying how personnel selection psychologists deal with their psychometric paradigm in daily selection practices in order to analyze their craftsmanship. This chapter discusses the combined ethno-methodological-discourse analytical approach which this study adopts to examine how practitioners carry out their craft, and further examines several important issues regarding the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

### ■ Research perspective

Interpretative or epistemological sociology tries to understand the behaviour of people by empathizing with them through empirical analysis rather than intuition (Bryman 2008, Silverman 2006, Kwalon n.d.). In this study, a discourse analytic approach is used to study how test psychologists follow the principles of their theoretical paradigm and deal with the daily demands of their personnel selection practice. The strategies respondents use to emphasize their particular way of understanding their social world of scholarly psychology, client demands, job applicants, selection agencies, colleagues, the employment market, and test publishers are analyzed and clustered into ideal types<sup>16</sup> (Willing 2008, Wood & Kroger 2000). The construction of ideal types out of research data is a well-known heuristic in the research tradition of interpretative sociology developed by Weber (Ossewaarde 2006, Weber 1992) and shows different ways of professional identification and accountability focusing and directing test psychologist's behavior<sup>17</sup>. In an ideal type, all 'assumptions, aims, and expectations of the personage, role, or practice in question' are clustered into coherent portraits as fully as possible (Aronovitch, 2011). Max Weber (1864–1920) originally developed the idea of

hypothetical 'ideal or pure types' in social theories to explain social events in familiar and understandable psychological terms such as dispositions, beliefs, and relationships between individuals. They can also be seen as 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of observable individual behavior as a product of unobservable dispositions, beliefs and relationships between individuals in the form of analyzed written transcripts of oral interviews (Watkins, 1952:42). Furthermore, the construction of ideal types through the analysis (Jones, 2012) of interview transcripts with selection professionals offers a way of structuring and analyzing the expected<sup>18</sup> diversity when conducting employment allocations. The heuristic aid of ideal types is directed more towards a total gestalt of the respondents and not to subsets of techniques; and in a sense, it mirrors the working actions of the personnel selection psychologist who also draws a portrait of the abilities, traits, and motives of a typical job applicant. While the psychologist matches this portrait to an ideal selection profile in order to determine job suitability, the adjective 'ideal' in Weber's ideal type refers to a portrait that signifies a full account of an agent's reasons for actions and of those habits or traditions of which he or she may not be aware (Aronovitch 2011). Personnel selection psychologists use holistic ideal types in a descriptive and normative way, comparing the impure object with the ideal construct (Watkins, 1952) in order to rank job applicants in an approximation of the employer's idealized images. The written discourse fragments of this study are analyzed into ideal types in order to attempt to define the quality of their professionalism, or what Sennett (2008) calls good craftsmanship. The heuristic of ideal types leads to limited judgments and lets respondents live their own lives in the sense that it may seem permitted to do so. However, it also helps in discovering themes in the tangle of interview data; and the fact that several respondents are present in all four ideal types retains the supposition that they actually represent people of 'flesh and blood'. Ideal types draw out key elements by cluster analyses and are not meant to be perfect.

The expected variety of actions among test professionals requires an open methodology or inductive research following a grounded-theory approach (Boeije 2005, Glaser & Strauss 1967) which allows for complexity. Although a grounded-theory approach is certainly not common practice in Industrial Psychology, it turns out to be a valuable methodology when studying the daily problems of personnel selection psychologists who work in a field with highly developed professional standards and instruments. The grounded theory approach is helpful for facing and embracing confusing and

<sup>16</sup> An ideal type is formed both by the accentuation of one or more points of view, and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (Shils & Finch, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> The purpose of 'ideal types' is to grasp the 'subjective meaning of things for agents' (Weber, 1949:43), in order to determine the awareness of these agents of the 'presuppositions and tendencies of the structures in which they live' (Aronovitch, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> From informal discussions with fellow test psychologists, as described in the introduction, it can already be expected that professionals strongly differ and even operate in conflict with each other in how they work and relate to the divergent and conflicting interests of job applicants, demanding employers, and scientific standards.

conflicting diversity, and helps to avoid tempting premature reductionism. It builds a manifold picture of a world in the process of becoming, and asks questions about what a phenomenon does for us--like who is employed where and why--instead of ordering social reality into laws or searching for permanence in complexity. To try to understand a particular phenomenon, the researcher must not only describe the actions of respondents in all their variety but interpret them as well. Interpretative sociology strives for 'value neutrality', which implies that the social scientist avoids including own ideas.<sup>19</sup> However, I cannot deny that the classification of experts' behavior into ideal types is strongly influenced by my own training in drawing personality pictures as a selection psychologist, that it is easier to identify with certain ideal types more than others, and that I find the tragic and seemingly unsolvable paradox they are in to be touching. Discourse analysis is not aimed at determining one truth or causal laws (as in the natural sciences) but at identifying rules and the variable and divergent accounts used by social actors to generate their behavior (Potter & Wetherell 1987, Wetherell & Potter 1993)<sup>20</sup>; and therefore seems an appropriate heuristic in this study, where a clear perspective is missing from the start. An inductive study helps to transcend the dominant present protocols and standards in test psychology which seem to hold the attention of most researchers in their attempt to empirically-statistically improve technology; while, unlike most research in Industrial Psychology, this study is not aimed at improving psychometric tools but rather at how they are used in practice. Moreover, the process of interpretation tries to be managed by the incorporation of theoretical-philosophical concepts as psychometric theory, disciplinary power and craftsmanship.

### ■ Research design

When questioning personnel selection professionals about their rationales, qualitative in-depth interviews seemed to be the most suitable research technique (Boeije 2005, Potter & Hepburn 2005). Although test psychologists operate in different sectors of society, this research focuses solely on personnel selection decisions in Industrial Psychology<sup>21</sup>--where the psychological, occupational, educational, financial, emancipational, organizational, and economical effects of their professional actions on job applicants and employers most intensely come together. A comparable study of craft and professional identities in the small world of academic workers (Knights & Clarke, n.d.) raises the question of whether the study runs the danger of hanging out the dirty

<sup>19</sup> For the theorist must, implicitly if not explicitly, determine whether the meaning and significance that agents attach to a situation correctly captures their intentions, actions, and their outcomes, which is to say, adequately depicts and explains them (Weber 1904/1949:58).

<sup>20</sup> The postmodernist even proposes that arguments about what is really real are futile (Gergen, 2001:806).

<sup>21</sup> Test psychologists quantify someone's job abilities with the help of an extended battery of instruments consisting of psychological tests, work simulations and interviews (Ter Laak 2011).

laundry for everyone to see, or of raising problems of trust despite the intention to contribute to the profession. Although the coherence between personnel selection practitioners seems weaker than in the field of academics (as test psychologists operate mainly privately without exposing themselves via publications or seminars), loyalty is an issue in this study too. At the time of conducting the research, most interviewed personnel selection psychologists were unknown to the researcher, who has worked for more than twenty years in the field of school and personnel selection. The Dutch Professional Association (NIP, 2013) only recently started to list the work experience of their members on their website to stimulate acquaintance and interaction.

Moreover, in the first research interviews, respondents were inclined to illustrate their work experiences with examples of 'glorious' personnel selection cases. In order to tackle possible impression management--a well-known phenomenon in selection assessments--two actions were undertaken: first, less-informed and therefore per chance less threatening university undergraduates were introduced as interviewees after being trained to perform a semi-structural interview (see appendix); second, the study deliberately focuses on the darker places in the overall well-swept positivistic corner of test psychology by directly asking respondents about possible negative experiences, dilemmas, and pitfalls in their work. In addition, the interviews focused on topics such as the relationship between academic and additional training, selection processes, dealing with dissatisfied employees and job applicants, choice, the number and combinations of measurement instruments, selection reports and feedback, the job motivation of respondents, and their perspectives on the future of the job.

### ■ Data collection

The time-consuming process of collecting participants' discourses took place between January 2010 and September 2012, in which periodic semi-structured interviews were conducted with seventeen personnel selection psychologists who were staffed mainly in eleven different personnel selection agencies. In four of these agencies, two of their staffed test psychologists were interviewed. The selected agencies mainly or exclusively staff academically trained personnel selection psychologists, advertise with slogans like 'we are a market leader with a long tradition of quality and reliability' or 'excellent assessment agency makes use of scientifically based test instruments and psychologists associated with the Dutch Association of Psychologists', and provide selection reports authoritatively signed with Masters titles. It is the dutiful adherence to strictly scientific psychometric principles which distinguishes these personnel selection psychologists from other trained practitioners in the field of recruitment and selection. Due to economic reasons, the number of Dutch recruitment and selection agencies shrank from approximately 2000 to 1250 from 2008 to 2013 (Spijkerman 2013, Meesters & Dress 2012); and approximately twenty five of them can be labeled as operating 'scientific'

personnel selection agencies, of which psychologists from the eight largest and best known agencies were interviewed in this study. Five of these agencies were involved in the initiation of a post-graduate training program in personnel selection psychology for their own novice experts. Two agencies are internal staff offices for police and military selection services and stand firm in the tradition of the dominant positivistic paradigm. One respondent has his own agency, one psychologist acts as a freelancer for several agencies, and one personnel selection psychologist is retired but was previously staffed as a Human Resource psychologist in a company. There were no refusals when approaching potential respondents, and the psychologists were communicative yet valued their anonymity. In order to win the respondent's trust, the name of each agency, professional, employer, or job applicant was kept anonymous.

Test psychologists generally do not offer much transparency about their work in order to keep applicants and rival test agencies in the dark; thus, their opening up in this research was at times so interesting that the interviewer forgot her neutral role.

**Interviewer:** *But on what do you save [time to cut back the costs of assessments]?*

**Psychologist 3:** *By doing a three-quarter interview, erm, to do a test online at home, very systematically.*

**Interviewer:** *Okay, awesome.*

**Psychologist 3:** *No, not at all. Then you put pressure on it and it works at the expense of quality.*

The interpretation 'awesome' of how the psychologist saves costs for clients by offering online testing and a shortened interview is evidently not shared by the psychologist who fears a loss of quality. The recursive effect of studying one's own profession can create an awkward atmosphere when the researcher imposes his or her own beliefs on the respondent. The decision to deploy student interviewers helped to lower the defenses of the respondents, resulting in them sharing more doubts, uncertainties, and confessions.

The interviews, lasting between 45 and 120 minutes, were recorded and fully transcribed with an average of 9500 words and are now archived. The respondents were one-third female and two-thirds male, with ages ranging from 27 to 66 years old. During an interview, one of the respondents confessed about not being academically trained and questioned the difference in training for everyday working life. Although the respondents are numbered from 1 to 17 (in the order of the interview date) the interest of the research lies in the professional, person by person.

### ■ Data analysis

One of the characteristics of the grounded-theory approach is that there is no conceptual framework beforehand so that the researcher is open to the acquired data (Brohm & Jansen 2012, Boeije 2005). The starting point is the empirical data--which in this study is the transcripts of interviews containing the natural, detailed, and unstructured language of the respondents. To get a grasp on the diversity of the empirical data, it needs to be analyzed by organizing it into themes through a process of open, axial and selective coding<sup>22</sup>. Coding is the process of assigning text passages to one or several codes or contextual categories, and serves as an analytical tool for the systematic analysis of data (Maxqda, n.d.). By reducing the data into concepts and categories, it can subsequently be interpreted and offers a starting point for literature study (Boeije 2005, Corbin 1986, Glaser & Strauss 1967). An initial frame of reference for the process of coding are the themes and conflicting voices of my fellow professionals during the informal dinner described in the introduction, which deepened rather than changed during the coding process. In inductive studies, the research process of interviewing and analyzing is blended in order to reach a better understanding of how personnel selection psychologists operate in practice.

<sup>22</sup> The grounded theory approach has three stages in the analyses of texts: ascribing keywords to parts of the text through open coding; comparing texts with the same code through axial coding; and searching for exceptions in found codes through selective coding (Boeije, 2005).

## 1.2 Theoretical concepts

In contrast to Organizational Psychology (where researchers from several disciplines and paradigms actively look at broad sociological issues, such as leadership, structure, or motivation), Industrial Psychology is characterized by a strong psychometric detail orientation and is led by a positivistic paradigm that has dominated the discipline for several decades now (Lievens & Schollaert 2008, Islam & Zyphur 2006, Deheu 2004). 'Decisive moments'<sup>23</sup> (Henri Cartier-Bresson in Sennett, 2008) in the work process of a personnel selection psychologist are the selection of competencies<sup>24</sup> for the job profile, the assembly of a test battery to measure these, and the analysis of the acquired data into a coherent suitability recommendation which is written down in a selection report. This inductive study of how test psychologists perform their craft recognizes the call for empirical studies of professional actions in the field of Organizational & Industrial Psychology regarding the complexities of their economic, political, and socio-cultural context<sup>25</sup> without applying a prescriptive or normative perspective (Janssens & Steyaert 2009, Pauwe 2008, Watson 2004, Barrat 2003, Legge, 1978). The coding and analyzing of the discourses in this practice-oriented HRM research has led to relevant theoretical concepts like the relationship of the theoretical paradigm of test psychology to disciplinary and social power, accountability, and vital craftsmanship in practice.

The psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology--wherein professional associations, scholarly publications and test publishers exert a homogenizing effect on professionals--allows for rational and numerical decisions to be made about who is the best candidate for a job. Although Human Resource Management practices in general (of which personnel selection forms a part) are only slightly related to patterns of power and inequality in the social world (Janssens & Steyart 2009, Legge 1978), Industrial Psychology has been closely related to 'the topic of bureaucracy and the larger theme of rationalization in the modern world' (Aronovitch, 2011). For Industrial Psychology to be successful, applicants and employers must accept the act of quantifying and ranking human abilities in numbers as selection assessments do. Test psychologists act as gatekeepers who guard the entrance of individuals into a career in mainly higher

<sup>23</sup> McCourt (1999) describes three stages for the personnel selection's 'prescriptive model': First, an analysis of the job tasks and what personal competencies are required from the jobholder to do it successfully in order to formulate selection criteria; Second, formulating job performance predictions by using measurement instruments to assess which applicant masters the competencies most; And third, the validation of the selection decision through an appraisal rating.

<sup>24</sup> Competence (in assessment) refers to the possession of adequate knowledge and skills through education and/or training to use and interpret assessments specifically or generally in the areas of relevant theory, methodology and practices; and to deliver assessment services at a level of performance defined by a standard (ISO 10667-2, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> The methodology of R-reflexivity stands for the reconstruction and reframing of new paths by bringing alternative paradigm issues into HRM, while the more practiced D-reflexivity refers to the deconstruction of orthodox HRM (Alvesson, Hardy & Harley 2008, Keegan & Boselie, 2006).

managerial jobs, commissioned by business and subjected to competitive market values (Verbrugge 2004, Watson 2004). Candidates must pass a selection assessment in which professionals check if they are the right candidates and worthy of being admitted to the desired job. The 'neutral, technical and depoliticized' concept of objectivity in the process of personnel selection mainly hampers an understanding of personnel selection practices in terms of the power-knowledge relationships (Barrat, 2003:1069) inspired by the concepts of disciplinary power and the society of control (Munro & Mouritsen 1996, Foucault 1977).

Sennett (2008:9) uses a broad conception of craftsmanship as 'an enduring, basic human impulse; the desire to do a job well for its own sake, in which crafts refer to the use of materials or techniques' varying from hairdresser or horse trainer to pharmacist. When technology takes over a considerable part of the work, it has adverse consequences for the skills and dignity of the expert who is left with a blurred professional identity that fails to provide a clear focus and direction in work. Industrial Psychology has a special position among crafts since technology has not been imposed by capitalism (as is the case with much work (Lilley, Lightfoot & Amaral 2004, Braverman 1974)) but has rather been embraced from the beginning of the twentieth century in an attempt to professionalize psychology at the level of the natural sciences. The craft of personnel selection psychology is largely defined by the application of 'objective' psychometric technology; however, when a craftsman's ambition for quality turns into an obsession for 'objective' perfection, Sennett (2008:241) argues that it produces 'unhappy,' inward-looking, narcissistic isolated experts who are in competition with themselves, unable to communicate their knowledge, and lack ability. Such experts are lost in 'worldly asceticism' and pursue the purification of the craft object from any trace of 'the narrative of its making' (Sennett, 2008:253-258), but get hurt and lose their self-confidence when their active pursuit of good work fails. Therefore, Sennett (2008:8) attempts to protect 'good' craftsmanship, or 'the skill of making things well,' through distinguishing characteristics--of which the following seem to apply to the craft of personnel selection psychology; extended skills training; being accountable for one's professional actions as technology is fallible; and an outward orientation.

***Craftsmanship is based on slow learning and on habit (Sennett, 2008:265).***

A slow learning process in which a standard for necessary skills in craftsmanship is set by a superior authority who assists younger professionals in training for the required skills, and for which the 10.000 hour rule of repetitive practice over several years applies, ends when the skills are right and the action has become a habit of a 'thousand little everyday moves that add up in sum to a practice' on which the expert can rely (Sennett (2008:77)). This is the reason why Sennett pleads for long labor contracts and

loyalty in order for professionals to be able to develop skills and routine. The reward of good work that is focused on concrete objects or procedures done in a routine and with 'steady rhythm' is a feeling of pride and of quiet, steady satisfaction' (Sennett, 2008:254-94)<sup>26</sup> that relieves stress since it takes people out of themselves. Work acts as a medicine (Achterhuis, 1984) or anchor (Verbrugge, 2004) when experts have to come to terms with challenges like technological limits, discordant quality standards, and commercial pressures from society.

***In contrast to animal laboran, homo faber means man as maker as the judge of material labour and practice (Sennett, 2008:6).***

In personnel selection psychology, which strongly relies on an impressive methodology of psychometric procedures and empirical-statistical based assessment instruments for objective decision making, experts must find a way to deal with this not so easily overlooked technology. Personnel selection psychologists distinguish themselves from other non-academic or non-psychologist practitioners in the field of personnel selection by a highly standardized and recorded work process (NIP 2010, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede 2008); and Sennett, following Beaverman's idea of labor control (1974), stresses that besides following objective standards and experiencing the how (2008:6 'erfahrug'), the craftsman 'constantly' needs the inner 'erlebnis' monitor of how it feels and why (2008:289). In order to work well, freedom from means and relationships is needed, since experts who only focus on the task can end up being amoral. Sennett argues that the way to face the danger of amoral expertise is to balance problem solving and problem finding with slow craft--which enables reflection during the critical moments in the process of making decisions.

***Antisocial experts (Sennett, 2008:246) mostly evade any form of (democratic) control (Lorenz, 2010:31).***

According to authors like Sennett (2008), Hoskin (1996) and Robert (1991), 'good' craftsmanship is characterized by experts who watch over their own morality, as technology and accountability are interrelated in craftsmanship<sup>27</sup>. The concept of accountability implies a self who acts and uses technology, and a self who oversees with a largely unconscious inner voice--both redefining the other as a part of the self, and judging itself (Hoskin, 1996:271). Accountability introduces a tempering social influence on the self and forces the self to become ethical by considering how one's actions

are viewed by an 'impartial spectator' or judge (to whom professional actions matter) in such a way that what 'is' becomes subject to an independent ethical touchstone of what 'ought to be' (Hoskin, 1996:271). The professional self concept is developed by creative internal communication and contemplation (Mead, 1964) that depends reciprocally on the behavioral interactions of test psychologists with employers and job applicants in a process of imagining how others will define the professional's behavior. Such 'generalized others' form a 'collective frame of reference' that enables the expert to behave consistently in the future (Roberts, 1996:44), and focuses the attention of the professional within the flow of experience (Schillemans 2008, Hoskin 1996, Roberts 1991, Goffman 1967, Mead 1934). 'Alongside the specter of exclusion that accountability raises' lies the rewarding 'gratification of praise' (Robert, 1991:360) for social, outwardly oriented experts from satisfied employers and job applicants.

The discourse analyses of the research data presented in Part Two are embedded in the theoretical concepts of professional knowledge and disciplinary power, accountability, and the qualities of 'good' craftsmanship.

<sup>26</sup> Pride in one's work lies at the heart of craftsmanship as the reward for skills that mature (Sennett, 2008:294).

<sup>27</sup> When the head and the hand are separate, it is the head that suffers (Sennett, 2008:44).

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## Part 2 Results

This report focuses on the differences among the daily practices of a group of homogeneously trained Dutch personnel selection psychologists operating in the psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology. They are characterized by clear standards, technology, and a professional identity; and they are called upon by businesses and organizations to make 'objective' HRM personnel selection decisions. The research data consists mainly of interview transcripts of personnel selection psychologists in test agencies for whom it can be supposed that--in accordance with the paradigm of Industrial Psychology--'objective' psychometrics lead in their selection contacts with clients and candidates.

### *-Fragment 1*

**Psychologist 1:** *As a manager in a social health institute, you're somewhat like a branch manager, somewhat independent, and you also have the ambition to make something of it. Authority doesn't work in this sector. She [the selection candidate] indicates no strong management skills, to be on top of it; she prefers cooperation. In the interview, she appeared the same, as someone who's very much in to the atmosphere, very 'all has to run smoothly.' Isn't much into opposition, and needs a department for which one doesn't need to attend to a lot. You could say this is a bit lax; you apply for a managerial job and then you fill in that questionnaire and don't want to manage. You don't want to be authoritarian, but when you manage you sometimes have to be the boss. And if you don't want to be the boss, than this is not the place for you. In health care, they can't pay top jobs top salaries, therefore they must settle for someone with more weaknesses and don't get the cream of the crop. She can grow in the organization and asks for less salary, but how I saw it and how I estimate it in the department [where she will be staffed], I think 'John is working there and he must be directed, this won't work.' That's how you present it in your report, not in the sense 'this is the advice about how you should do it' but mostly it's some kind of discussion. Think about this or that.*

This initial fragment illustrates what Sennett (2008) describes as the proud expert who wants to deliver quality for its own sake. The expert self-confidently and frankly speaks about his craft, vividly explicating his considerations in the ongoing process of selection, and showing a quite impressive way of reasoning in the sense that the selection data seems harmoniously integrated into a logical and substantive selection recommendation. Moreover, the fragment reveals some concerns the expert has: first, the assessment figures seem to insufficiently speak for themselves as they have to be made meaningful, vivid and recognizable through a process of logical reasoning and storytelling; and, second, at the end of the fragment, the formulation of a decisive selection recommendation unexpectedly stays out of the picture and the expert's rather persua-

sive interpretation of the selection data confines itself solely to listing the strengths and weaknesses of the job candidate for the employer to 'think about'. It is not obvious why the expert puts his marks on the selection process by analyzing 'objective' data but restrains from taking responsibility for the final selection decision. Like the expert in fragment 1, respondents in this study are generally inclined to provide the research interviewer with refined selection cases that show that the data of a proportioned range of psychometric instruments is conscientiously analysed and elaborately integrated. To be able to study where the psychometric paradigm falls short in practice, the respondents are explicitly interviewed about their doubts and beliefs beyond these prevailing instances of impressive expertise and able experience--which are less reported on their own initiative.

In this part of the research results, the craftsmanship of test psychologists united by a powerful paradigm is explored by analyzing the diversity and contradictions of the daily practice of the respondents in my research. In the first two chapters, the achievements of the psychometric paradigm and its less perfect applications in daily practice are brought forward by the respondents. Chapter One starts off with an exploration of the convincing role of psychometrics and the professional pride they provide for experts. In Chapter Two, practitioners show how they deal with some generally acknowledged flaws in psychometrics for which they cannot easily find solutions and seem to divide opinions. Both chapters show that the daily practice of test psychologists is characterized by prevailing objective and instrumental thinking that is extrapolated from and reinforced by the psychometric paradigm--even when its deficiencies give rise to a disturbing discrepancy between theory and practice, as well as professional dilemmas with overcharging clients or strategically responding candidates. After the first two general chapters, the remaining discourse reveals the various approaches of respondents as illustrated by the presentation of four different ideal types in Chapter Three to Six who reflect diverse versions of professional action in the daily practices of personnel selection psychology. The last chapter ends with an overview of the variety of professional practices in Personnel Selection Psychology.

## 2.1 Professional pride

Professional workers in general legitimate their working actions by referring to highly specialized knowledge and skills which they exclusively possess and fully appreciate (Tummers 2013, Davenport 2005). Skilled work has standards, or what Sennett (2008:27) calls 'impersonal routines of quality', to prevent dependency of the craft on the individual expert. The professionalism of personnel selection psychologists corresponds to the characteristics of specialization and standardization. Imposed on by their knowledge of the psychometric principles of psychological testing, experts strive to optimally meet employers' need for objectively allocating the best applicants to the vacant jobs. Practical philosophers like Verbrugge (2004) and Sennett (2008) warn about the counteractive effects of overly recorded and rationalized 'modern' work, since in capitalistic economies technology is often introduced 'to maximize managerial control,' which converts labor into 'hired labor' and reduces the professional's command over the labor process (Lilley, Lightfoot & Amaral 2004, Braverman 1974:36). In technocratic jobs, workers tend to become alienated by a separation from 'the means with which production occurs,' by the simplification of the job, and by being employed to expand 'the capital' belonging to the employer' (Braverman 1974:35-36, Taylor). Despite these warnings, psychometric technology has been intentionally applied in the everyday working practice of Dutch tests psychologists for several decades (Gregory 2013, Deheu 1995). Over the years, a comprehensive battery of empirically valid<sup>28</sup> and reliable<sup>29</sup> assessment instruments has sustained experts in fulfilling their occupational task in which the collection of information and the solving of selection problems are central (Reinhardt, Schmidt, Sloep & Drachler, 2011). Personnel selection psychologists gratefully embrace the regulative rule of psychometrics as an indispensable part of their diagnostic process (or Hypothesis Testing Model (Bruyn et al, 2003))<sup>30</sup> to guide their professional behaviour down the appropriate and conventional pathways. In this chapter, the specific body of psychometric knowledge and the techniques of personnel selection psychologists are also looked at from the perspective that human beings are 'subjects' who are assessed and compared to one another and brought into a common frame of reference (Brown & Stenner 2009, Foucault 2002). Discourses about concrete practices are explored to define conditions that enable experts to use psychometrics--

<sup>28</sup> Required qualities for assessment instruments are content validity, predictive validity and construct validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Content validity, focusing on the fact that the items to be measured are a representative sample of the total population (which is the job content domain) leads to less concerns since the tools of the selection psychologist demonstrate satisfactory content validity, while predictive and construct validity are still insufficient (Arthur, Day & Woehr, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> The psychometric principle of the ascertained reliability of measurements indicates that, within a probability range of preferably 90% in selection decisions, exactly the same result will occur at a later moment in time (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Psycho-diagnostics in personnel selection psychology is considered a research process--starting with the question of the client and the formulation of hypotheses, subsequently collecting data on which psychological statements about people are made, and ending with a written recommendation and giving feedback about that (Ter Laak & De Goede 2005, NIP 2010).



what Brown and Stenner (2009) refer to as universal knowledge that is invariable to circumstances. Besides regulative rules derived from the professional association that leads the process of personnel selection, this chapter begins with the rules for the broader level of society and organizations that influence both how professionals interpret and acknowledge their behaviour and assign meaning to their individual work (Willing, 2008).

### ■ Societal call for objectivity and transparency

The fundamental codes of a culture - those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices - establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home (Foucault, 1966:XX, 2002).

#### *-Fragment 2*

**Psychologist 14:** *And it's, of course, not without reason to, erm, deploy an assessment, but I see it as very useful. So I'm really behind it, because I think a selection psychologist makes very careful objective estimates of someone's performance and, erm, also qualities. And (sighs), yes does it more thoroughly than a HR-advisor who only conducts an interview. So, I really look upon it as a surplus value in assessment.*

The expert in fragment 2 accentuates with some effort what she regards as the added value of psychologists (in comparison to HR-advisors staffed at organizations) who perform better selection assessments because of their more extensive use of 'objective' assessment instruments. To manage the dilemma of a number of interested candidates that apply for an available and desirable vacancy, and to supply businesses with the best job candidate, the society aim for equal opportunities (Thomas, 2003) and to open 'a door for the able and non-wealthy' (Hoskin & Macve, 1986:133) by applying objective selection processes--for which test psychology claims to provide in order to avoid nepotism and discrimination in the labor market (NIP 2012, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede 2008, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006). Even though test psychologists strive for the objective measurement of job suitability in order to avoid an unfair allocation of jobs on the basis of social networks, descent or seniority, the public image of psychological testing is not favorable. The basic themes of technocratic society--namely standardization, specialization, synchronization, concentration, maximization, and centralization (Dijkman 1998, Toffler 1981)--seem to converge in psychological tests; which means that tests are under suspicion because of their impersonal, bureaucratic and technocratic image. Moreover, they are vulnerable to the improper use of power which the expert has over both the employer who wants the best candidate for the job and over the applicant who wants to have access to a job (and applies in particular to culturally-biased tests that discriminate against minority groups when their results are im-

properly compared to those of western white males (Bleichrodt & Van der Berg 2003, Gould 1996)). The objectification of job applicant suitability reveals power relationships between the expert, candidate and clients--by using methods and techniques in the institutional contexts of selection agencies and organizations to act upon the behavior of individuals (Foucault, 2002), Personnel selection is a minor practice (or 'sub-specialty' (Pfeffer, 1993)) in the broad field of Industrial & Organizational Psychology or HRM that studies employment-related managerial practices (Watson, 2004), but has a considerable impact on the careers of others. Advice regarding the suitability of applicants for certain jobs has far-reaching consequences in the psychological, social, financial, physical and geographical respect for the assessed individual and for the business operations of the concerned employer.

The work of test psychologists is not only governed by objectivity, but also by the democratic rule of transparency for their professional actions. Personnel selection psychologists are called to account for their 'scientific' allocations of jobs in an attempt to correct possible missteps as deviant professional power can be hidden behind so-called objective testing. The call for transparency is understandable in regard to the highly specialized profession of test psychology, a profession that entails mainly one to one contact in a scarcely visible assessment room where even the ordering party, the employer, cannot enter for reasons of unwanted interference with the standardization of the selection process. In general, professional accountability encompasses transparency and imposes visibility of the self, both to the self and others; yet transparency is assumed to seriously harm the 'objective' assessment of test candidates who can only show their 'true' behavior when they are not influenced by a pre-knowledge of psychometric instruments and principles. The societal rules of objectivity and transparency conflict internally and place the professional in a dilemma, since too much openness about their selection instruments and procedures with the public interferes with the 'true' selection performances of job applicants. The first Dutch psychologist who opened up the closed circuit of psychological testing and imposed transparency from inside by offering candidates detailed information on how to prepare oneself for a selection assessment caused a row in the mid-eighties which resulted in his exclusion from the Dutch Association of Psychologists (Bolcom 2014, Bloemers 2011:2009:2007, Van Minden 2011). His initiative for transparency was an eyesore for personnel selection psychology because preparation creates an undesirable interference with the actual level of performance for the assessment candidate--assuming, as Industrial Psychology does, that such a level exists and can be ascertained by assessment instruments. When informed assessment candidates achieve better assessment results than those based on their 'true' abilities, they will possibly disappoint their new employer later on. Now, because of the irreversibility of this process of openness, the association of test psychologists tolerates the new situation and formulates a professional standard

which demands that candidates should be explicitly instructed in order to prepare themselves for an assessment beforehand (NIP 2014). When assessment candidates start at approximately the same level of pre-knowledge, mutual differentiation between competence mastering becomes achievable again; and although preparation leads to a general higher level of performance, it is presupposed that competencies are bound to a certain personal maximum level which cannot be transcended through training. The professional association of psychologists (NIP, 2014) provides free brochures and digital information for assessment candidates and employers about the various steps in the process of personnel selection assessments. In a further attempt to curb public distrust, test quality is monitored by a committee from the Professional Organization of Psychologists<sup>31</sup>, the face validity<sup>32</sup> of tests is improved in order for candidates to better understand and accept why tests are used (Lievens & De Soete, 2011), and a code of professional conduct is introduced and regularly sharpened in which the rights of the job applicant are decidedly declared (Verhoeven, 2008). Although the public debate on tests in society has yielded more transparency in the practices of test psychology and of professional procedures formerly only known by the experts themselves (NIP 2014, Verhoeven, 2008), societal criticism does not enforce any essential changes in methodology as tests are the basis for personnel selection advice, as the expert in fragment 2 states. Psychological selection testing remains largely incomprehensible to others; and the societal criticism of tests seems rather to stimulate test psychologists to shield themselves against exposure to the judgments of others who threaten objectivity. One respondent refers to the awful gorilla 'Bokito', who at the time of the research interview made an unthinkable jump over the canal around his shelter in a Dutch Zoo, as a metaphor for professionals in personnel selection (psychologist 2).

Another more compelling threat to the 'scientific' profession of selection is competition with other professionals in the field of recruitment and selection when test publishers brook their gentleman's agreement with psychologists and opened up the tests market to non-psychologists. For more than a decade, the test market in the Netherlands is accessible for all human resource workers--who only require limited additional training in applying intelligence and personality tests at the publisher (Boom Testuitgevers, Hogrefe, Pearson Clinical, n.d.) and gratefully embrace these tests be-

<sup>31</sup> Since 1967, test authors can voluntarily offer their tests to the test commission of the Dutch Association of Psychologists (COTAN) for an external quality check on construct and predictive validity, reliability, norms, test guide and forms. In the professional standard for test use (Sijtsma, 2010) it is further stated that a test is qualitatively good when it is relevant for answering diagnostic questions and fair to minority groups.

<sup>32</sup> Face validity is the first intuitive impression of a test candidate that the test measures what it supposes to measure. Projective tests, like the Rorschach test, pose only a little face validity and are rarely used in personnel selection in the Netherlands (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

cause of their scientific authority and commercial value. Test psychologists are strongly methodologically oriented, and their professionalization essentially involves mechanisms to exclude amateurs (Larson, 1977). Industrial Psychology and mental testing are 'offshoots' (Coon, 1993:758) of the technological and behaviorist ideals from the beginning of the twentieth century which pursued standardization instead of subjectivity in the description and prediction of human behavior. Although the Dutch social sciences were originally influenced by both the phenomenological approach as well as the Anglo-Saxon empirical-analytical style, the positivistic paradigm came to dominate in the Sixties and was largely untouched by the post-modernist crisis in the 1970s. Nowadays, academically trained personnel selection psychologists unequivocally stand in the tradition of the dominant positivistic paradigm (Strien 2002, Deheu 1995), which has yielded impressive 'methodological gains' in the form of sophisticated testing procedures, increasingly 'valid' diagnostic instruments, and a refined selection of items (Bliesener 1996, Gibbs & Riggs 1994).

Through the 'academic' and therefore credible allocation of the best person to the right job, Industrial Psychology promotes business and maximizes organizational performance. The technocratic paradigm of Industrial Psychology has been successful in industry (Coon, 1993)<sup>33</sup> since it excellently matches the bureaucratic model of organizations<sup>34</sup> (McCourt, 1999), which separates jobholder and job and assigns individual job promotion on the basis of one's merits (Herriot & Andersson 1997, Weber 1947). Within highly structured hierarchical organizations where differentiated jobs are embedded into clear functional profiles and responsibilities, and where employees are constantly judged on their ability for a position based on the assumption that their mastery of job competencies varies from task to task and that organizational performance is 'simply the sum of individual performances' (McCourt, 1999), clients benefit from the psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology--which provides adequate tools for the unequivocal quantification of human work. The acceptance of Industrial Psychology has been due to the scientific management of bureaucratic organizations, whose 'various institutional mechanisms function to provide for its existence' (Islam & Zyphur, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Empirical-statistical Industrial Psychology strongly expanded during the First World War, when military selection under laboratory-like conditions was needed, and then later in bureaucratic organizations (Broek & Verhoeven 2009, Brown & Stenner 2009) where 'methodologically sophisticated' (Coon, 1993:768) personnel selections were valued by the industry.

<sup>34</sup> Although the bureaucratic organizational model was supposedly meant to build objective and rational business operations that avoided 'nepotism and patronage' (McCourt, 1999), at the same time it 'hampered autonomy, creativity and, in the plain sense, humanity' (Weber 1978, 2:973, 975).

In sum, test psychology does not seem to benefit much from the transparency imposed on it by public debate or commerce, as it undermines the work and significance of expensive, academically trained personnel selection psychologists who have regarded 'objective' psychometric technology as the royal way for selecting individuals for careers for several decades now (Arthur, Day & Woehr 2008, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006, McCourt 1999, Deheu 1995, Dawes, Faust, & Meehl 1993). Respondents do not seem visible or accountable since their psychometric instruments are supposed to objectively reveal and read the abilities and traits of job applicants, perceive the 'true' other, and make what is hidden visible so that each applicant is offered equal opportunities despite their social background. It is this call for transparency that complicates the work of personnel selection psychologists.

#### ■ Scholarly discipline

The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ideological representation of society, but he is also a reality fabricated by the specific technology of power that I have called discipline (Foucault, 1979:194, 2002).

#### -Fragment 3

**Interviewer:** *What do you dislike most in your job?*

**Psychologist 9:** *Erm, I actually find it very nice work. It's more the things surrounding it. Most frustrating are the things which run slow in the organization, or something.*

When directly asked for negative aspects of his work, the expert in fragment 3 does not refer to the job itself, but to other annoying issues that surround it. The psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology perfectly matches the societal and organizational wish for objective selections based on the assumption that 'scientific', empirical-statistical based assessment instruments entirely focus the standardized selection process on the assessment of the abilities of candidates and release it from the influence of social disparities between candidates. A paradigm where 'objective' technology, uninfluenced by the expert or others, provides the knowledge and authority to influence careers and to take responsibility for selection decisions can be largely regarded as instrumental. Instrumentality confines one to the proper use of things as 'prescribed in implicit or explicit norms, standards, and targets of performance' (Hoskin 1998:265) and makes one liable to respect one's duties by using adequate selection instruments or adequately informing candidates and employers (West & Bowman, 2004). The discipline of Industrial Psychology not only exercises influence by ranking applicants in a hierarchy of job congruence, but also instrumentally guides the actions of personnel selection psychologists by setting compelling professional standards (NIP, 2010). These standards of objectivity and standardization provide personnel selection psychologists with the professional self-image of a neutral mirror (Robert, 1991) that

claims not only to objectively report applicants' job suitability, but also to successfully predict their future job performance. This self-image or reference point for the psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology enables experts to deal with a 'confused reality' (Roberts, 1996:42) and to focus, like the expert in fragment 3, their perspective predominantly on productivity through the objective and quantitative measurement of job candidates--and to the detriment of the moral reality of everyday working life, which includes organizational contexts that depend on the strategies and interests of employers and HR-departments, and the personal contexts of job applicants. Society's call for fair selections is mainly dealt with in an instrumental way; and the moral issues, or the recognition that tests and assessments evoke anxiety and resistance, seem largely disregarded by Industrial Psychology (Verhoeven, 2008). Focusing solely on diagnostics does not allow for the context where selection decisions encompass setting the right selection criteria together with the employer in the ever-changing world of jobs and advising candidates and employers.

#### -Fragment 4

**Professional 10 [Royal Marines]:** *We have a guidebook by which we select on eight anchor points. That is social skills, team spirit, achievement driven, discipline is very important with us, stability of course, motivation, deployment management and communication skills. In the guidebook, it's clearly indicated what's wanted and what's not. 'Stability is very important,' I tell the boys and girls who get a negative recommendation for stability, 'the jeans', our core business, boys who want to join defense with no experience. Most things you can't check, we do check the police and justice for discipline. I have the least trouble with rejecting people on that front, then it's just your own fault and you simply should not have done it. Maybe that's somewhat harsh. However, I have the most trouble with people who had traumatic experiences and haven't dealt with that.*

Fragment 4 shows that professional rules, like describing the dimensions to be assessed for admission, guide and regulate the selection behavior of the professional down appropriate pathways. The professional standard seems to leave no ambiguity in the ethical situation in which the expert acts against her own beliefs and rejects applicants who are victims of traumatic life events. Although the idea that fair job allocations are derived from intentional individual performances--and not coincidences, bad luck, social networks, descent or seniority--is one that is held by the expert, the guidebook offers a secure handhold when moral conflicts arise about how to treat candidates. The rejection of young applicants (who the expert in fragment 4 refers to as 'the jeans,' which they mainly wear) who are victims of traumatic life events is emotionally discordant for the expert even though she realizes that their emotional instability makes them less suitable for the job; yet the guidebook authoritatively decides that such candidates are not admissible. Her decision to reject candidates despite feelings of empathy in the

pursuit of 'fair' decisions reinforces the neutral self-image of personnel selection psychologists as 'impartial professionals' who work with 'a neutral set of techniques, which passively and objectively record and represent' (Roberts, 1991:355) the relevant competencies of a job applicant and who restrain their subjective influence and beliefs on the selection process. In fragment 4, the paradigm of Industrial Psychology prescribes professional procedures that 'discipline' the expert towards objective selection, but fails to appeal to the societal call for democratic selections when the expert is confronted with candidates who are themselves not to blame for possible problems. She is left no other alternative than to act against her personal and democratic idea of fairness and to follow the mandating nature of the professional standards that are possibly reinforced by the military context of her work. At the moment she starts to account for her 'somewhat harsh' rejection of candidates with a criminal history as being a result of their own wrong doing, she again does not question the professional standard and reflects no further. A psychologist who acts against the professional standards and for example ignores assessment data in favor of the candidate can be officially accused of and in the worst scenario expelled from the certifying instance<sup>35</sup>. Analogous to the function of the Freudian super-ego, the presumed or actual violation of professional standards embodied by an official complaint can lead to fear of rejection or expulsion from the professional association. This homogenizing effect of discipline, arising from fear of exclusion, motivates professionals to obediently stay within the lines of the discipline (Hoskin, 1996). The regulative influence of the professional standards defining professionalism reduces both the professional's individual responsibility and the difficult moral dilemmas in human services. However, when asked about selection assessments that respondents consider unsatisfying, they show self-confidence and faith in their work; 'let me think; I never lay awake over a selection assessment' (psychologist 9). The powerful psychometric paradigm supplies test psychologists with a professional identity that is sufficiently solid to deal with the unavoidability of mistakes in psychological assessment, that considers possible mistakes as existing outside of the responsibility of the expert, and that allows for a full reliance on technology. The Committee of Professional Ethical Matters of the Dutch Association of Psychologists (Geertsema, 2010) also refers to instrumental problems in psycho-diagnostics, such as assessment instruments that do not fulfill necessary scientific criteria or the inaccurate application of psychometrics to minority groups. Instrumental thinking reinforces a focus on the rigorous perfection of psychometric technology for a 'very precise meas-

<sup>35</sup> In the Netherlands, where the title of psychologist is unprotected, personnel selection psychologists can certify at six different instances, namely, in order of relevance for daily practice, the Dutch Association of Psychologists, ISO 10667, the register of Organizational & Industrial Psychologists, the European EAWOP, the American SIOP, and the organization for selection agencies Summum (2014), which are distinguishable from other less explicit scientific operating selection and recruitment agencies (Bloemers, 2012).

urement and prediction of individual-level behavior, personality, and affect' (Islam & Zyphur 2006). Respondents report not only conforming to the standards of the paradigm in which they highly believe but also to the policy of the test agencies where they are staffed, as is seen with the slip of the tongue 'we score, we; no, I mean I' (psychologist 3). Conformity in professional performance enlarges objectivity and limits the influence of experts on the working process--like with the expert who considers it to be 'nonsense' to apply a numerical reasoning intelligence test for 'jobs for which you don't have to calculate' (psychologist 8) but does so anyway, or the expert who is not allowed to 'suddenly change' a given recommendation when confronted with a disagreeing candidate 'so, erm, we don't do that, that advice stands' (professional 10). Professional performance is embedded in and committed to the policy of the expert's agency; so even when respondents doubt a specific professional rule, they give in and follow it. By acting strictly according to professional principles, experts are convinced of acting right and can also conceal themselves from the moral responsibility of their professional selection actions.

#### *-Fragment 5*

**Psychologist 4:** *I think the job largely consists of, in fact, between brackets, 'reading another person'. And that you use all sorts of instruments for that.*

In her pursuit to reveal the 'true' person, the authority of the expert in fragment 5 comes forward in her task to 'read' what is supposedly already present in a passive, readable subject--like abilities and traits. The fragment illustrates that social power plays an important role in even technical fields like personnel selection, where 'objectivity' is used as a justification for actions by claiming that applicants are neutrally selected regardless of their social status or network (Islam & Zyphur, 2006). When the expert's professional identity is that of the impartial all-knowing observer who 'sees without being seen,' as in the central position of Foucault's Panopticum<sup>36</sup> (1979), candidates are treated passively and are never certain of how, whether or not, and by whom they are observed. Respondents report observations of which applicants might not be aware: like observing candidates in the waiting room of the selection agency (psychologist 4), writing down application behavior such as 'very consciously searching for vacancies' or 'what a lousy day, you open the newspaper and see a vacancy and think that's what I'll do' (psychologist 1), or noting how candidates present themselves in terms of eye contact, clear use of language, passiveness, and initiative in the acquaintance (psychologist 2).

<sup>36</sup> The Panopticum is an architectonic design of a prison, which allows the wards to observe the prisoners continuously and is used by Foucault (1979) as a symbol for the way to exert disciplinary power over others even when they are not aware of it and to force them to comply.

### ■ Instrumentalization

Information as somehow independent of the interests of those who produce and use it ... as if it were objective facts; the detail can be contested but not its basic capacity to reflect the truth (Roberts, 1991:359).

#### -Fragment 6

**Psychologist 13:** *Test results are very important, because this is in fact a very objective way of presenting behavior and the qualities of people. When someone enters the room, we all have a feeling of like or dislike, but that doesn't predict very well how someone performs in his job. Especially when someone doesn't have a social job, like technicians, then it's important to know if someone is intelligent enough. Can he learn sufficiently and fast enough to deal with the complexity of the job?*

The technology used in the craft of personnel selection consists of a standard administration of preferably empirical-statistically based psychological assessment instruments whose results are proven to be more reliable<sup>37</sup> than that of 'unarmed'<sup>38</sup> intuitive diagnostics that are more biased by emotions or values. When the applied instruments meet the professional quality requirements, they are regarded as being neutral mirrors<sup>39</sup> of the abilities of the job applicant, which makes it possible to accurately figure out the objective suitability of job-candidates. While personnel selection psychologists use several tools (varying from intelligence tests, personality tests, interviews, and simulations exercises), psychological tests match the dominant paradigm of Industrial Psychology best since they enable the highest level of reliable and 'objective' precision in quantification. The expert in fragment 6 regards intelligence tests as being what Sennett (2008:86) calls 'robots' that cease to 'be measured by the human standard' by enlarging human powers like 'mirrors in a fun fair' that distort objective measurement to a 'giant size'<sup>40</sup>. Experts try to only use reliable tests 'because otherwise I don't want it, then it doesn't make any sense' (psychologist 14), as these are supposed to reflect, free

<sup>37</sup> When repeatedly administered, reliable tests deliver approximately similar results. For selection decisions, a reliability of .90 on a 0 - 1 scale is desirable (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> An 'unarmed finding' stems from an intuitive or clinical judgment, without the use of any standard assessment instrument or technique (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> A common wrong pronunciation amongst layman of the Dutch word 'psychologie' is to switch the first two letters, the 'p' and 's', into 'spychologie'. As a result, the first two letters sound like the Dutch word mirror ('spiegel'). A scholarly student periodical at a department of psychology used this slip of the tongue and called their newspaper 'spiegel-oog', which is a contraction of both the words 'mirror' and 'eye' (University of Amsterdam, 1980s). Whereas in English the vocal 'p' in the word 'psychology' is not explicitly pronounced, it is pronounced in the Dutch language.

<sup>40</sup> Sennett regards technology as a 'mirror-tool' (2008:84) that invites us to think about ourselves. He distinguishes between 'replicants mimicking ... our own internal machinery' (2008:98) and 'robots enlarging us' since they are 'stronger, work faster, and never tire' (2008:85) and teach us about human failure. The replicant shows us as we are; the robot as we might be (Sennett, 2008:85).

of bias, the strengths and weaknesses of the applicant in the 'objective' assessment data. Psychological tests are valuable assessment instruments since they quantify human performance, transcend injustice from personal bias, likes, or dislikes, and collect objective and numerical information on abilities and behavior so that test psychologists can base their selection decision on 'hard data'. The expert in fragment 6 can ignore bad instincts, feelings of doubt, and personal responsibility with peace of mind because tests ascertain the validity, reliability and relevance of his knowledge.

With tests allowing for a quantitative knowledge of subjects, the paradigm of Industrial Psychology only accepts quantitative knowledge where the subjective influence of the expert on the selection process has tried to be reduced through the deployment of several assessors and multiple instruments, which according to respondents is usually limited to two observers in a role-play: the psychologist, a colleague, or a professional role-player. The acquired cumulative assessment data is subsequently numerically averaged in order to further neutralize individual biases or assessment tendencies (Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede, 2008). The scientific knowledge of the personnel selection psychologist ('savoir-pouvoir', Foucault 1977) to objectively examine and evaluate people is preferably expressed in figures (Hoskin & Macve, 1986)<sup>41</sup>. Archived assessment data makes it possible to 'classify individuals en masse into categories, and eventually into populations with norms' (Hoskin & Macve, 1986:106) so that one can define superiority. The ranking of job applicants based on the assumptions that people differ in measurable personality traits, can be compared, and can be put into a hierarchical value system varying from little to surplus worth for the employer, establishes a 'truth' and is considered the best developed control technique in personnel selection psychology (Islam & Zyphur 2006, Barrat 2003, Hoskin & Macve 1986:107). Whatever instruments are used, as the expert in fragment 13 asserts, the performance of candidates is preferably described in powerful numbers on rating scales varying from four, five, nine, ten, twenty to hundred point scales depending on the reliability of the measurement (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006). Although a five or nine point scale is commonly used in psychological measurements, one respondent prefers the percentile scale because it's a shame to lose information' (psychologist 1). The reduction of dynamic and complex human behavior into 'discrete units that can be administered' (Hoskin & Macve, 1986) resembles the idea of the permanence of natural order in the natural sciences while the quantifying of variables in Industrial Psychology at most enables the performance of elaborate statistical analyses for the support of hypotheses

<sup>41</sup> The 'numerical objective judgment' of the traits of a person, 'arithmetical mentality', has its roots in medieval universities from around 1800, when written examinations (instead of oral ones) and grading were introduced as a new technique for the 'systematic surveillance and observation of pupils' (Hoskin & Macve, 1986:106-109). A mark is a convincing construct, 'like an examination itself', and appears 'so self-evident once invented that its prior absence is perplexing' Hoskin & Macve, 1986:126).

within limits of probability (Islam & Zyphur 2006, Lord & Novick 1986). The forceful double aspect of professional 'power' and objective 'truth' reinforces and disciplines selection experts in their examination of human activity, quantifying the tested behavior and producing a written archive of results and judgments (Barrat 2003, Roberts 1996).

The intensive instrumentalization of test psychology--which allows experts to define 'success and failure' and to allocate and award 'access to resources (Hoskin & Macve, 1986:134)'--is shown by the broad range of psychological tests offered by publishers (Pearsons 2014, Harcourt 2014) and the development of self-made, customized tests and other assessment instruments by commercial selection agencies. Since only a minority of the interviewed psychologists actually develop their own psychological tests (either for their own use or for the agency), the selection tools are not possessed by the professionals themselves but by test publishers and some of the larger selection agencies. The fact that tests are not public domain and that one needs a license to buy them implies that psychologists are consumers of their tools, which inherently conflicts with professionalism. Although the responsibility for the selection process is in the hands of professionals, they have little say over the quality of the psychological tests they use and no freedom to change them. In Industrial Psychology, which aims as much as possible to reduce the subjective influences on the selection process involving the professional, the psychometric tools mainly owned by test publishers seem to add to the process of what is called the de-skilling or destruction of craft (Braverman, 1974:24)<sup>42</sup>.

Despite their powerful technology, respondents are confronted with two serious threats to the objectivity of their measurements that have to be dealt with in practice: first, an unwanted interference of candidates' impression management with 'true' test scores that makes assessment scores ambiguous or non-representative for underlying traits or abilities; and second, candidates who refuse to accept the truthfulness of assessment results and disagree with the professional selection advice. Such critical opinions or thoughts from the candidates are not generally appreciated by personnel selection psychologists, who assume candidates to be prejudiced towards their own interests and therefore reject introspection as a measurement tool<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> The more science is incorporated into the labor process, the less the worker understands the process; the more sophisticated the machine becomes as an intellectual product, the less control and comprehension of the machine the worker has (Braverman, 1974:27).

<sup>43</sup> By discussing and valuing thoughts, thought becomes 'a thought-about-the thought' that is different from the original thought (Coon, 1993:764) and therefore cannot attain objectivity.

### Impression management

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (Foucault, 2002).

#### -Fragment 7

**Psychologist 1:** *Every applicant directs his questionnaire, of course. With every question, he thinks 'what kind of job is this actually, what kind of thoughts should you say, how am I put together, what am I made of, and what is still acceptable to write down'? Of course, people are on their guard. Each applicant is on his guard, especially with the [personality] questionnaires.*

The claim of Industrial Psychology that instruments in personnel selection psychology only report 'objectively' is not the whole story since they are clearly not neutral in the effects they produce<sup>44</sup>; and as Foucault (2002) argues, they evoke resistance in candidates who are forced into being subjects. The expert in fragment 7 acknowledges that 'of course' job applicants cheat on personality questionnaires in order to make a positive impression and enlarge their chances of getting the desired job since 'no applicant copes with neurotic complaints' (psychologist 1). In reaction to the expert's 'objective' search for ideal applicants--who are mainly looked upon as subjects for the withdrawal of preconceived information in order to place them within a hierarchy of relative value and worth instead of accepted for their uniqueness--candidates try 'to read the set of ideal personal and professional qualities that are required, and then address and present oneself in the light of these expectations' (Robert, 1991:358). Although personality tests can 'only lead to results purely based on self-image, which is useful for self-reflection but not for very important decisions as is the case in selection' (psychologist 3), respondents continue to use personality questionnaires with poor validity. In their attempt to prevent personality questionnaires from becoming worthless when assessment candidates cheat and fail to show the 'real' person, respondents use selection norms to elevate the norm and compensate or check it with interviews and observations. Experts use only the extreme scores in personality testing--although high scores can also indicate 'that you're dealing with someone who's inclined to be honest and open in these sorts of things,' as is seen in selection assessments for 'health care' where 'people really want to show emotions' (psychologist 1). Furthermore, experts do not settle for purely listening to possible unlikely stories from candidates and want to observe the candidate's behavior in the interview or simulations where 'you can see the, erm, erm, flesh and blood of the test' (psychologist 1) and 'see someone yourself' (psychologist 3:7). Just like selection norms, experts must remain vigilant in the observation of actual behavior since 'everyone is able to show it [the desired behavior]' but it

<sup>44</sup> Only the rich can afford to be stupid, for others ability is a necessity, not an option (Sennett, 2008:97).

does not have to always be 'natural' (psychologist 12). Vocational tests<sup>45</sup>, which belong to the category of vulnerable personality tests as well (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006), possess a validity which would perfectly fit the task of personnel selection; however, they are in contrast to the general personality questionnaires not widely used by respondents since 'you can guess what happens when you administer it in personnel selection; they always score high on the category for which they apply' (psychologist 1). Apparently, the solutions for detecting and unmasking impression management cannot be applied to vocational tests which are supposedly too easy to see through.

#### -Fragment 8

**Professional 10 (royal marine):** *I still have the illusion that people are very honest. They say a lot, about drug or alcohol abuse, that's just not done in the army ... but they tell it. That's what I always find so amusing. Because of direct questioning, we ask about sexual abuse for example, then it's very difficult to lie. That's simply proven.*

The words 'illusion' and 'prove' used in the same fragment indicate the confusion the expert is confronted to when trying to align the belief in the objectivity of personnel selections with the recognition of impression management by candidates. In her experience, candidates are naïve, do not see through her intentions, and are skillfully persuaded by her direct manner of interviewing to speak 'honestly'--even if it is to their detriment. The final phrase 'that's simply proven' overrules the expert's doubt about the truthfulness of the candidates' reactions, as is illustrated by the initial phrase 'I still have the illusion', and impression management is assumingly counteracted by the professional skills of the knowing expert. The expert's claim that the interview is an adequate tool against impression management is supported by her experience that applicants confess adverse facts which they should have kept to themselves in a selection situation. The way of counteracting impression management since 'there're a lot of candidates who tell fantastic stories; even more so when they've done a lot of assessments, because then you know exactly what you have to say' (psychologist 7) and of being able to reveal the 'true' applicant is to resort to simulation exercises in order to be able to observe the candidate's actual skills and performance. Even though respondents defend their use of less objective assessment instruments (such as personality questionnaires, interviews and simulations) because of the influence of impression management by using special norms or triangulation<sup>46</sup>, this does not alter the fact that these instruments ultimately fail in 'objective' personnel selection. Although the issue of impression management is a serious threat to the ability of test psychologists to

<sup>45</sup> A vocational test examines the careers and activities that a person is interested in, and which occupations best fit with an individual's interests, (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Triangulation is a fusion of various measurements (Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede, 2008).

mirror the 'truth', and therefore asks for the attention of experts, respondents avoid dispensing personality questionnaires or simulations which would lead to a possible alienation from their powerful psychometric paradigm.

#### Disagreeing candidates

##### -Fragment 9

**Psychologist 1:** *People are strange creatures. They have a mirror held up to their face. I try to picture it, not as sharp as possible, but somewhat clear though. Even if there are negative things, people have to know that. You can of course be vague. You don't help anyone with that because afterwards it shows. When there's something negative, you have to give a sort of warning. That's the way it works. They even argue in the first percentile, when 99 percent of the people score higher! Most people reasonably self-assess how they stick together, some people exaggerate their qualities. Then you can discuss their disappointments later on. You must make mention of this in the report; 'a modest attitude or a high opinion of his possibilities'. Write it down; 'here's someone who thinks he is going to make it'. Okay, first show he really can.*

According to the expert in fragment 10, it may be expected from a personnel selection psychologist to clearly and straightforwardly formulate the 'truth' to candidates, who have a right to know. He does not regard highly those candidates who 'strangely' refuse to accept the 'facts' due to a self-assessment that does not correspond with the test data. Because of his primary focus on psychometrics<sup>47</sup>, this expert seems to overlook the fact that the idea that talent rather than inheritance or connections is the just foundation of upward mobility implies that losers in the competition for a certain job--especially the ones in great need of a better job--may experience having personally failed and have performed inadequately. Failing in the competition opens up for the candidate the problem of dealing with 'the image of self as failure' (Roberts, 1991:358), which can inflict strong emotions of humiliation. However, respondents get 'very annoyed' when a rejected candidate 'disagrees and becomes very angry' (psychologist 16) or 'almost rude, denigrating and belittling' (psychologist 6), since angry or aggressive behavior is interpreted as an expression of an unwillingness to accept the 'truth' that is not in the interest of the candidate--as critiques are 'all about negative stories' (psychologist 7) although the facts speak for themselves. To prevent the unpleasantness of being confronted with the strongly negative emotions involved in being rejected, respondents inform candidates upfront with a written recommendation and contact them later when the possible emotions of anger or disappointment have faded, which makes 'the

<sup>47</sup> Industrial Psychology tends to regard the introspections of candidates as being 'contaminated by unwitting interferences and memory limitations' (Coon, 1993:774).

conversation ... much more constructive and of more use for someone' (psychologist 6). Sometimes, they even equip assessment rooms with 'an alarm button' (professional 10). Experts assume that candidates refuse to accept the message because 'it's too damaging for them,' and the interests are so high that 'they have trouble admitting negative stories' (psychologist 7). Experts' firm trust in the objectivity of selection technology leads to a negative ratio between time investment and return which does not motivate the expert for lengthy discussions of assessment results with candidates who 'always recognize themselves in the positive aspects, but not the lesser; what can you do?' (psychologist 9). Candidates who openly attack the objective truth of psychometric results are a hindrance in getting the work over and done 'fast, I want to get it over fast, simply because I'm busy' (psychologist 3); because discussing why applicants disagree with the selection results has little additional value for test psychologists, who adhere to the assessment results and are left with no other conclusion than that the candidates' protest is based on a false self-image. Although one respondent 'thinks' it is logical that candidates become angry when their 'dream falls to pieces' (professional 10), counseling or therapeutic skills in combating incorrect self-images are not considered part of the job description for a personnel selection psychologist. Rejecting candidates is an unpleasant aspect of the job; but being repeatedly confronted with disagreeing applicants who debate negative results and use insignificant arguments that display a lack of knowledge of the selection principles can bring an end to an expert's empathy and time so that 'when I have explained it three times, if you don't understand, or do not want to, or don't agree, that's still the story in the end' (psychologist 15).

When the professional responsibility of the expert is dominated by the psychometric paradigm, technology is regarded as infallible ('for my opinion, I thought it thoroughly over, I used good instruments and so I reached that conclusion' (psychologist 6), and neutral assessment data prevails, as is seen with the respondent who complains that 'people fall over every full stop and comma in a report' even though 'I've written down such a balanced story' (psychologist 6); and so the expert changes 'nothing' (psychologist 9) and at most takes a deep breath and again explain what you mean' (psychologist 6).

## Legal rights

### -Fragment 10

**Psychologist 9:** *We assess something at a certain moment. We report it, and that's it. We don't have feedback consultations, we just write a report and after the report it's ready. They'll receive it at home, and when they're not satisfied they can call us. The psychologist explains, but that's not standard.*

Although selection specialists have the legal obligation to allow job applicants to respond to the reported selection assessment results (NPV, 2013), the expert in fragment 10 seem to doubt the relevance of this. His belief in the accuracy of psychometrics according to the professional standards (illustrated by the phrase 'that's it') seems to make it unnecessary and uninteresting to additionally have to account for his advice. Besides the right to be informed about their assessment results, candidates are also allowed to block the selection report from being sent to the client,<sup>48</sup> so that 'each candidate receives a concept of the report and has the right to make comments' (psychologist 7). An appeal to one's legal right to keep personal findings private is the ultimate weapon of objection for personnel selection candidates who are unable to or did not try to persuade the expert to adjust the results or advice. Candidates can decide to use their right to block a negative selection report and prevent it from being archived at organizations and 'trouble you for years' (psychologist 7); however, this right must be put into perspective--because when the candidate blocks a report the client 'knows there's something wrong' (psychologist 5), which can be equally or even more harmful than reporting negative assessment results. Candidates 'very seldom block the report' (psychologist 4) because it not regarded upon as being very helpful, as it is the word of the layman against that of the professional. Only one respondent mentions a collective blocking of selection reports by a group of candidates who 'clashed with a supervisor' who used the assessment as 'a legal form of a punitive expedition' (psychologist 7) that they could not refuse to join; however, protected by safety in numbers, they made a political statement and blocked all of the reports regardless of the results. In spite of protective legislation for job applicants, it seems nearly impossible to win a discussion with professionals who are determined to not alter results--so that objecting candidates are left rather powerless and are forced to accept a negative report, or 'infrequently' add at the end of the report 'a postscript of half a side, in which he disagrees with the report' (psychologist 4). The legal right to offer selection candidates the opportunity to react to the selection results seems directed more towards silencing the upset rejected job candidates than to take account of the expert. Therefore, legal rights of assessment candidates in personnel selection (like being informed about results and blocking the selection report from the client) lose value since they appear to not be very effective or protective in practice.

<sup>48</sup> The candidate has the right to block reporting to the external offering party. In the case of a blockade, it is announced to the offering party without further explanation (NIP, 2010a).



## Subverting resistance

### -Fragment 11

**Psychologist 1:** *A psychological test is a bit mean of course, because you answer questions without knowing what the consequences are. If you don't want to be associated with this category, 'manipulation' for example, you can say afterwards and on second thought; 'I want nothing to do with this category', but then we could go on forever. So it is as it is.*

According to the expert in fragment 11, it is very difficult for candidates to intentionally influence or challenge personality test results because statistically based relationships between item and category deviate from what candidates deduce on the basis of the face validity of these tests. Psychometric factor analyses<sup>49</sup>--for which only a minority of the respondents are adequately equipped, needing the necessary statistical knowledge and software to conduct factor analyses and to determine the validity of test results themselves--obscure a direct insight into the consequences of the candidates' test responses and can therefore be used as a weapon against objections and impression management, to which personality questionnaires are especially vulnerable. Experts obviously profit from difficult conceivable psychometric principles for which transparency can only be offered to a limited extent when dealing with disagreeing candidates, effectively consolidating their professional power. They refer disagreeing candidates to professional principles that are framed on evidence-based psychometric qualities and leading figures, and impose candidates to accept their truth and 'to acknowledge their authority' (Roberts, 1996:41) without further substantial discussion. More impressive than personality tests is intelligence testing, which is regarded as a 'rather objective assessment and we won't discuss that at length' (psychologist 3) and leaves less opportunity for the candidate to react. A strategy that 'turns out well' for respondents when convincing candidates is to start with the feedback from the intelligence results 'because people accept it quickly'--like the measurement of blood pressure, for which people do not say, 'doctor, that is worthless, that's not possible' (psychologist 1). Intelligence test figures impress by their 'objectivity' and their capacity for quantification, and are supposed to enforce in candidates the same respect that one has for a doctor so that test psychologists do not have to accept or expect lengthy and futile discussions or objections when they present the 'hard' (psychologist 8) intelligent scores.

<sup>49</sup> A factor analysis is a multivariate statistical technique, identifying for a large number of observed variables a smaller amount of underlying variables. These unobserved, underlying variables are called factors (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

Another way of exerting difficult-to-combat professional power over job applicants who disagree with assessment results because 'it was only that one time' (psychologist 8), is to refer to the ascertained reliability of triangulation in which intelligence scores are the most decisive. The use of several reliable instruments and assessors refutes candidates who are generally unable to think of more substantial arguments than that of a black out or sickness during the assessment. To prevent and combat potential objections about the temporality of selection assessment results in advance, respondents strategically ask at the start of the assessment day 'if the candidate feels fit, otherwise we'll plan another date, so it can't be said afterwards' (psychologist 8). Objections from disagreeing candidates with a lack of adequate psychometric knowledge are regarded by experts as tired or theoretically incorrect and are therefore not taken as a serious defense. Only one respondent puts the reliability of triangulation more into perspective--since even with extended assessment, 'it's sometimes a dilemma that you participate with a person for just one day, and have seen a lot of him, but it's a snapshot' (psychologist 5).

## Return responsibility

### -Fragment 12

**Professional 10:** *But often, also when you confront people with certain aspects about their behavior, then they often won't accept it. Sometimes with that test I say; 'Yes, you filled it in yourself didn't you? What do you mean by this, can you explain this?' Then they have to think for a moment, and often something comes out.*

The expert in fragment 12 persuades disagreeing candidates by boomeranging their protest against negative assessment results back and asking them to explain perceived inconsistencies themselves. As respondents are generally not inclined to blame assessment instruments for negative results, they confront protesting job candidates with the sobering fact that it was actually them who produced the results since 'you filled in the test yourself' (professional 10) and 'it comes out of the test, so you indicated it yourself' (psychologist 1); or that they behaved in a certain way and ask 'the candidate why he would think that I got that image' (psychologist 6) and 'what do you mean with it, can you explain it?' (professional 10). Since candidates are generally unable to think of convincing professional arguments, they will not easily admit to having cheated or managed an impression while filling in the tests; and as they do not want to appear unintelligent or uncooperative, they are left with little more option than to make some sense out of the negative scores themselves. By intensively questioning an applicant's motives, and by arranging an atmosphere in which the candidate is heard, disagreeing candidates seem to be persuaded by their own arguments; 'I ask the candidate for an explanation, then it's accepted most of the time. Then I ask if the candidate has an ex-

planation himself, and through these conversations it always works' (psychologist 8). Actually, the expert listens without really hearing since the goal is to convince the other of the 'truth' of the assessment scores.

### Selection report

#### -Fragment 13

**Interviewer:** *When candidates disagree, do you change the report?*

**Psychologist 5:** *'Never' is a big word, but when I write a report and put five points of interest in it, and the candidate says he wants to have one, four and five out, this isn't possible. But when the candidate thinks it has to be phrased differently, I'm prepared to go along with it.*

Although experts may vary in their strategies of coping with candidates who dispute the 'truthfulness' of assessment results, the interviewed personnel selection psychologists close ranks when it comes down to who decides what is written in the report since 'this is what the candidates know; they don't have the power to decide what is put in the report' (psychologist 4). The expert writes the results and conclusion down as 'we think it should be, and not how someone addresses it himself, so that's the way it is' (psychologist 1). Respondents report polishing the language in selection reports into more socially acceptable or less sharp terms to avoid problems and 'discussion, people getting angry', so that they do not write 'you're not very reliable'; however, 'candidate cuts corners' or 'candidate has the idea that rules don't count in social intercourse, may be ignored if in his eyes the situation asks for it, he makes his own rules and also thinks it's permitted' (psychologist 1). Although one respondent states that candidates 'very seldom; I can't remember' (psychologist 7) disagree, when candidates protest respondents are prepared to delete certain fragments because candidates sometimes 'cheerfully give too much information' (psychologist 1). A candidate who insists that a fragment about problems in an intimate relationship that 'my employer doesn't have to know' should be left out of the report seems to be punished for criticizing when the expert changes the text in 'emotional instability; it's up to the client to ask himself how things exactly are' (psychologist 1). An expert's willingness to yield to an objecting candidate's wishes and to leave a negative personal sentence out of the report only appears compliant, since surely the professional diagnosis of 'emotional instability' gives rise to more alarming speculations about the candidate's suitability than the concrete naming of having problems with someone else. Experts allow minor changes in the syntax but definitely refuse to alter data or discuss the final selection advice (since 'fiddling around in your test result ... is something you mustn't do' (psychologist 1)), and so the conclusion or tenor of the story is 'never' (psychologist 6) changed as they seem convinced of what Robert (1996) describes as 'details can be contested but not the capacity of objective facts to reflect the truth'. Respondents believe that their reports represent 'the es-

sence of a person' and to 'nail someone down' like that is a 'satisfying' thing to do (psychologist 2).

Although job applicants are legally allowed to add objections to the selection report, the relationship of the negotiating parties--in which experts do not easily allow for candidate objections because of their trust in the psychometric paradigm--is fundamentally unequal. The expert's firm attitude of refusing to apply fundamental changes to the original presented assessment results reflects inflexibility and an unquestioning attitude towards the accuracy of the results, leaving candidates with minimal power to have a say in the ultimate selection advice of the report. Although interviewed psychologists report occasional experiences with unsatisfied job applicants, it is rare that selection assessment candidates make an official complaint. The fact that official complaints hardly occur (NIP, 2012)<sup>50</sup> could also mean that the previously described strategies of experts dealing with disagreeing candidates are effectively carried out in the privacy between assessee and expert. Only one of the respondents (psychologist 4) mentions a (unofficial) written complaint from a rejected job applicant that was sent to the employer from his agency, who also happened to be a co-assessor in the role play. It is unlikely for candidates who are accepted for a job to openly protest against the decision of professionals since, whatever its accuracy, their decision turned out to be right--like we see with the selection candidate who wonders 'only a few pages, after fourteen years of work, how can that be me, but okay, I'm through'. Experts show even more disregard for legislation and for the opinion of the assessee when a report is not written at all, restricting themselves to recorded notes for their own use only, and providing verbal feedback (a plain 'yes or no' with short additional comments (psychologist 9)).

The belief in psychometric instruments imply that the responsibility of negative test results lies with the applicant, so experts are not forced to revise their decisions and disagreements can be ignored as being unprofessional or biased arguments from the candidate. The candidate who openly doubts the general rule of objective testing is faced with a difficult task since criticism is not taken seriously and they run the risk of being punished, as complaining applicants are suspected of having a false self-image or of acting out of biased self interest. Disagreeing candidates are left 'humiliated' (Sennett, 2008:249) with little power to object to the not easily understood standards of psychometric work, and discussion is more oriented towards getting the message accepted by the candidate than focusing on exploring the possibility of mistakes. Personnel selec-

<sup>50</sup> In 2012, seventy-five complaints were filed with the supervisory board of the Dutch Organization for psychologists (with a total of 13.000 psychologists). However, although the number of complaints is small, the impact can be huge (NIP, 2012).

tion psychologists do not seem to regard critical assesses as being valuable sources for indications or evidence of possible professional mistakes, irrelevant for checking the validity of their advice, and overrule empathy for criticism, so 'in the end it's take it or leave it' (psychologist 7).

### ■ Review

Quantifying human competencies is strongly recorded by empirical-statistically based standards of reliability and validity; and despite some criticism that numerical or statistical models may help in understanding but that abstractions differ from real life (Goodhart 1975:116, Watkins 1952:38), this standardization ascertains the professional core value of test psychologists, defines the quality of the selection advice by the extent to which psychometric rules are followed up, and allows experts to form a solid professional identity to which many of the in this chapter presented interview fragments attest. Two important rules, or fundamental codes as Foucault (2002) puts it, seem to guide the professional behavior of personnel selection psychologists in order for them to select fairly on the basis of merits: 'objectivity' and 'transparency'. These form the enabling conditions for psychometrics to be used as valid knowledge for fair personnel selection decisions, yet seem to be inherently conflicting in practice. The rule of transparency stems from the democratic call for openness in professionalism in order to prevent misuse and to promote understanding and accountability for professional actions. However, in contrast to public opinion, personnel selection psychologists do not consider their psychometric work as soullessly technocratic but as a preferred means of ensuring these fair job allocations, and tend to protect their valuable craft from too much exposure and transparency, as this would subvert the regulative rule of objectivity as a central feature of their positivistic paradigm. Transparency or openness, both highly valued by society and candidates, is less appreciated by test psychologists when it is detrimental for the objectivity of their selection assessments and not wise for commercial reasons. It is the regulative rule of objectivity in Industrial Psychology and the experts' belief in 'objective' selections that seems to hamper an open and transparent attitude towards candidates and society as a whole and lead to a somewhat spastic and rigid reaction from the practicing psychologist to critical calls for openness and transparency.

### *Disregarding feedback*

The paradigm of test psychologists provides such a strong belief in psychometrics and professional self-image of being a neutral mirror in which the true qualities of the candidate are reflected that feedback is largely ignored by the respondents in this chapter. Despite their solid belief in test results, experts experience in daily work that rejected candidates or clients make objections which have to be dealt with. The profes-

sional knowledge of test psychologists embedded in the specific working procedures in the test agencies where they are staffed--not only disciplines the expert but also provides power over others. In reaction, applicants try to see through the 'truth regime' (Roberts, 1996:41) which makes the interplay between job candidates and personnel selection psychologists an example of constructive power in which job candidates strategically influence the power controlled over them by applying impression management and personnel selection psychologists try to overcome this undermining effect on 'objectivity' by reacting in equally inventive ways. The research data in this chapter shows that respondents show little respect for disagreeing candidates, and tend to handle them as subjects for the mere acquisition of essential information on their suitability, with whom they are not supposed to have actively involved relationships. In addition, they spend little time on follow-ups with clients, and are reluctant to exchange information with competing professionals outside the agency. Candidates who try to influence the selection results by applying impression management or who openly express disagreement threaten to violate the basic rule of 'objectivity' are confronted with slightly emphatic, but moreover defensive or cynical experts who are generally not convinced by their critiques and put them easily aside. Whatever these criticism, respondents display a not very accepting and sometimes even punishing attitude towards objecting candidates, assuming that failure is due to the inadequate performance of the candidate during the selection assessment or to a lack of self-knowledge. Any latent regrets in experts are smoothed over by the paternalistic rationalization that they used 'objective' assessment results so that rejection is only in the best interest of candidates. Candidates, who openly dispute the neutrality or truthfulness of assessment data, can face rather relentless experts who are in a more powerful position to ignore their feedback, and are less prepared to give candidates the opportunity to express their disagreements and to bring up possible mistakes, or will take less time to extensively explain.

### *Reducing opportunities for learning*

Although this lack of exploring and putting aside criticism enables personnel selection psychologists to complete their selection assignment in line with the professional standards within given time limits, it takes away from them the opportunity to extensively explore what Sennett (2008:20) calls problem solving and finding since 'it is at the level of mastery ... that ethical problems of craft appear'. Learning largely stays out of the picture when test psychologists operate in isolation with candidates, clients and fellow psychologists. The incorporation of received or expected criticisms from judg-

ing others<sup>51</sup> leads to self-knowledge, since 'people can learn about themselves through the things they make [do]' as Sennett (2008:8) puts it. A dialogue between experts and others requires an open, non-defensive attitude, as others can only exert influence when the expert considers them as belonging to one's group, synthesizing the rules and wishes of this other by internalizing them into one's professional identity (Mead, 1934). However, experts deploy their professional knowledge to win discussions with disagreeing candidates, thereby missing opportunities to sincerely see what their work means to others (which could jolt them into working better). From the perspective of good craftsmanship as defined by Sennett (2008), an expert should not be isolated but should be oriented outwardly and should actively create opportunities for others to react to his or her professional actions and identity. An outward attitude contributes to the development of a self which is 'thoroughly social in origin' (Roberts, 1996:43, Goffman, 1967, Mead, 1934) since others are needed to reflect and confirm the self--to operate as a mirror in which the self is discovered in the attitudes that make it visible. By relying on their 'scientific' methods, test psychologists avoid opportunities for self-criticism and learning, run the risk of manipulation based on mistakes, and give 'wrong advice to your fellow man with a friendly, empathic face' (Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede, 2008). Sennett (2008) argues that professionals should not strive for unattainable or even undesirable perfection, or accept half-hearted compromises, but actively tackle opportunities for innovative problem solving and problem finding<sup>52</sup>.

### *Less focus on moral accountability*

Although the work of test psychologists has been critically attacked in the past (Verhoeven, 2008), experts still use tests, and conceal their accountability behind an impressive body of knowledge, the legal rights of candidates, and limited transparency. Vertical accountability for the paradigm and business prevails in test psychology, while the concept of 'horizontal accountability' seems to play a less significant role in the craftsmanship--even though this is an important condition for learning (Schillemans 2008, Roberts 1991), and prevents the 'degradation' of the craft (Sennett, 2008:248). Respondents prevailing instrumentally account for their professional actions towards society, candidates, and clients--which misses certain moral reflections on the effect of their selection decisions on others. When professional and paradigm

coincide, experts do not have to take individual responsibility for their decisions and do not have to envision what happens to rejected candidates after their 'objective' formulation of the selection advice. The independent performance of personnel selection psychologists which identifies professional ethics with the informed implementation of objective, scientific tools without the incorporation of others in setting standards for professional conduct, allows for test psychologists to less focus on moral or horizontal accountability. Accountability does not thrive when others are excluded from influencing the professional identity of the expert (Roberts, 1996), and experts, who are not very visible, isolated or locked up in their own vision run the risk of going ethically off course, with humanly meaningful goals and goods coming at the expense of individuals. The well-intentioned rational focus of scientific personnel selection to avoid injustice and subjectivity in the allocation of jobs and to safeguard the equal treatment of applicants by claiming that their acceptance or rejection is only based on their own merits paradoxically seems to lead to a disregard of individuals and poses the risk that the psychometric technology of Industrial Psychology becomes misused as merely a control mechanism for business.

In sum, the exploration of the powerful role of psychometrics in practice yields prominent themes like the adverse effect of transparency on the objectivity of assessments, an equation of fairness with objective job allocations, a dominance of instrumental thinking over moral accountability, and an undervaluation of feedback--all of which have the potential impact of an one-dimensional development of the professional identity of the individual expert. Test psychologists who get a sense of doing right when they follow standardized selection procedures exactly are inclined to withhold an open attitude towards criticism and reject feedback, which not only obstructs improvement but also yields the perspective of boring, repetitive, and routine work. When psychometrics are considered most important and faithful, professionals become no more than passive administrators with nothing more to do than to record, analyse and report a test score. When the psychometric paradigm is entrenched in what Islam and Zyphur (2006) call a 'strictly realist epistemology', this scientific rigor fixes professionals in their neutral mirror image that is only able to 'improve the quality of the mirror image; to polish and clarify its techniques' (Roberts, 1991:355) through even more sophisticated statistics and instruments.

<sup>51</sup> 'There are sociable ways and antisocial ways of being an expert'; the sociable expert employs guiding standards that are 'transparent' and 'comprehensible to non-experts,' whereas the antisocial expert is isolated (Sennett, 2008:251-252).

<sup>52</sup> It is impossible for us to stand outside the regimes of knowledge that power-relations produce. Having invented them we cannot either avoid or simply transcend them: we are bound at best it seems in trying to improve them, either by reducing their inadequacies and arbitrary effects as far as possible, or by extending their number and scope (Hoskin & Macve, 1986:134).

## 2.2 Work worries

### -Fragment 14

**Psychologist 7:** *What is someone worth?*

When personnel selection psychologists are confronted with such an ambiguous and seemingly unsolvable task for which the expert in fragment 14 places himself, the available psychometric technology will obviously always fall short. When asked about possible distress, pitfalls or upsetting dilemmas that keep them awake at night, respondents initially refer to issues like constructing a correct job profile, the usage of inferior quality tests (since 'there're really only a few all criteria approved tests', psychologist 3), dealing with contradicting assessment information ('your instruments don't always point in the same direction', psychologist 15), or lacking time to write an extended selection report which is 'too important' to look upon as 'routine' (psychologist 5) or 'standard' (psychologist 8) and 'gives much stress' (psychologist 12). These prevailing technical issues as presented by the respondents relate to every 'decisive moment' in applying the selection process--namely job analysis, choice of assessment instruments, result analysis, and final recommendations. They demonstrate the sincere effort of personnel selection psychologists to meet the demanding scientific standards in practice and avoid measurement faults. A test psychologist strives to avoid false positive advice<sup>53</sup> which recommends a wrong candidate, and to avoid false negative advice which rejects a right candidate because of the unpleasant consequences for everyone concerned. Psychometric-based predictions are assumed to be more reliable and valid than so called 'unarmed' or intuitive judgments (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006), the psychometric standard but still fails to assure complete certainty (Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede, 2008) since 'a prediction is never 100 percent. You can't say "I know for sure that this man or woman will become a success or not' (psychologist 14). This chapter explores how test psychologists deal with professional uncertainty in their attempt to answer the challenging question of fragment 14. In their discourses respondents refer to issues concerning the predictive and the construct validity<sup>54</sup> of their selections.

<sup>53</sup> False positive selection advice (to mistakenly accept an unsuitable candidate) is regarded as a type 2 error. A type 1 error in selection is when a suitable candidate is mistakenly rejected (Pearson & Neyman, 1967).

<sup>54</sup> The term predictive validity is frequently used to express the predictive value of tests and other measurements used in personnel selection. Construct validity expresses the extent to which the results indicate the concepts to be assessed (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

### ■ Predictive validity

#### -Fragment 15

**Psychologist 6:** *That [lacking feedback] is a difficult aspect of my job. I very often don't hear what happens afterwards; is someone truly competent, did he actually get the job, did he succeed in the job? That's what I almost never hear back about. That's what I regret, because then it becomes very difficult to evaluate if I've done it right. I think I do my work well, I'm really convinced of that, but maybe it's nice to monitor that better afterwards. But most of the time I stand behind my decision. It is fortunately only very occasionally that I think 'did I do it right'.*

Although selection is essentially an 'exercise in prediction' (McCourt, 1999) in which the test-score is regarded as a predictor of non-observable behavior outside the test situation--the so-called criterion score (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006)--the expert in fragment 15 states that the accuracy of predictions is not structurally checked in everyday practice. Respondents regret that 'I've seen hundreds of candidates, but I don't know how they ended up' (psychologist 14) but 'that's the way it is' (psychologist 7). It is remarkable that factual feedback on the accuracy of daily predictions misses since all predictions carry a range of errors within them. In his farewell speech, the Dutch professor Drenth (2000)--the author of methodology text books that have been used at universities in the Netherlands for several decades--asked for attention to the continuous lack of feedback and insufficient trial and error experiences as one of the major dilemmas of psychology. While the author argues that the responsibility for gathering feedback lies with the individual expert, respondents in this study do not seem to consider that their role as an advisor to 'build it into some sort of system' (psychologist 14). They avoid taking responsibility for supervising their individual professional predictions and refer to other parties like 'the contractor of the agency who hired me' (freelance psychologist 6), or report the lack of time and skills to follow up on the sometimes huge amount of candidates which they assess each year. Statistical research of research departments of larger selection agencies is restrained to mostly ascertaining the validity of psychological tests, the development of norm groups, and the construction of new tests and assessment assignments but no research on predictive validity--which means that 'further scientific foundations (what did they do with the advice, how does the candidate function) are left out' (psychologist 13). Respondents relate their need for feedback on the accuracy of selection advice to situations in which candidates are mistakenly rejected, and to commercial motives and missing repeated orders as a possible negative effect of false positive advice for organizations. When feedback is 'important but difficult or impossible to achieve,' or when the expert feels like 'not being responsible', personnel selection psychologists are offered no other option but to accept the uncertainty of their selection advice, or to pay not too much attention to this dispiriting fact and go on with the job.

As compensation for the lack of structural feedback in their daily practices, respondents refer to the 'scientific based, and I subscribe to them too' (psychologist 13) results of well-known meta studies (Ryan, McFarland, Baron & Page 1999, Schmidt & Hunter 1998<sup>55</sup>) in which the criterion-related or predictive validity of several psychological assessment techniques is compellingly demonstrated through in particular the intelligence test<sup>56</sup> with a number one predictive value of approximately .50<sup>57</sup>. Combining intelligence testing with several measurement instruments improves the incremental predictive value of diagnostics by as much as .80--which clearly offers additional value when compared to an 'unarmed finding' (Arthur, Day, McNelly & Edens, 2003). The publications of Schmidt and Hunter (1998) and Ryan et.al. (1999) are regarded by respondents as the ultimate proof of the predictive value of positivistic personnel selection and form the basis for the legitimization of selection assessments. However, when general findings are applied in daily work and 'good practice' is considered 'universal' (McCourt, 1999) this implies that any valid<sup>58</sup> assessment measurements can supposedly be used to predict job performance regardless of the type of job--which would make the job or organizational context in personnel selection irrelevant (Chen 2006, McCourt 1999). Using scholarly publications as if they are directly applicable to specific work situations undermines not only the job performance analyses that have actually become dispensable, but also provides experts with a false sense of competence. Despite the lack of structural feedback, respondents talk with reasonable self-confidence about the quality of their work, displaying an unproven trust in their own competence: 'in general, I don't doubt my diagnostics, you're never 100% sure of your story. That's just not possible. But most of the time I am (psychologist 15), ignore uncertainty and trivialize faults illustrated by the respondent who remembers only 'two or three' incorrect assessments and tested 'five to six thousand' candidates in 'the last five years' of 'whom at least half were rejected' (psychologist 9, police). Other respondents come to terms with the lack of confirming or correcting structural feedback on the accuracy of their work and try to live with the fact that 'doubt is a part of the job, and that my colleagues think so too' (psychologist 5). Others resign themselves and prefer to assess candidates on the job itself since 'the best is really to follow someone for half

<sup>55</sup> The meta study of Schmidt and Hunter combined approximately eighty-five years of research on the predictive value of selection instruments due to the long lasting dominance of one psychometric paradigm in selection psychology ensuring 'identical theoretical assumptions' of the included researches (McCourt, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Intelligence is generally measured by correct answers to questions, but intuitive leaps and associating unlikely elements in problems are impossible to test by these multiple-choice questions. Therefore, IQ scores reflect the superficial management of many problems at the expense of depth (Sennett, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Predictive values can vary between -1.0, absolute oppositional predictions, to 1.0, optimal predictions, with 0 as non-predictable value (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> A measurement is valid when the influence of systematic errors on the result is significant small (Verhoeven, 2011)

a year' (psychologist 9) or doubt the added value of feedback 'since organizations fundamentally change every few years' (psychologist 7)--which implies that a fitting match between an applicant and a job is actually less relevant, and that predictions for success only last for a short period of time. Such displays at accepting attitudes are a non-productive condition of the exploration of problem solving and finding which results in experts remaining uncertain if they have to adjust old habits or their professional self-images. Untested self-efficacy withstands examination and reinforces both a certain disregard or alienation from judging others or critical spectators and the danger of total identification with the image of the professional self and 'an illusory belief in the closure and independence of the self' (Roberts, 1991:357). Without actual proof of right or wrong doing, respondents are self-confident and generally do not doubt their diagnostics. A narcissistic professional self which does not transcend or respond to changing circumstances fits the invariability of the dominant psychometric paradigm that offers rather stable working principles and little encouragement to adjust an expert's professional identity over time well. Although this theoretical stability allows for effective research, it is the diversity in paradigms that leads to creative insights. Industrial Psychology strives to be 'self-sufficient' as a discipline, and to operate without referring to complementary areas-- in contrast to the forum of Organizational Studies, in which the research of different theoretical outlooks cooperates (McCourt, 1999).

### ■ Construct validity

#### -Fragment 16

**Psychologist 8:** *I see competencies as a methodology to operationalize what you observe. But I think this is the least bad form. It actually concerns someone's personality and what someone takes into his work. You can't catch that in assessments of course.*

The expert in fragment 16 does not take for granted that the observed scores are an automatic representative of the 'real' person since competencies or behaviour are only superficial representations of underlying traits. The recognition that selection assessment might fail to reveal the 'true' person is a troubling consideration with possible unsettling consequences for professional identity. She regrets that assessment fails to answer the central question of 'personality', instead focusses only on competencies<sup>59</sup> through the use of simulations resultantly relies on the psychometric paradigm of

<sup>59</sup> Competencies describe the necessary behaviour and underlying characteristics for the performance of a particular role of task (Lievens & Schollaert 2008). Competence in assessment: possession of adequate knowledge and skills through education and/or training to use and interpret assessments specifically or generally--including the areas of relevant theory, methodology and practices--and to deliver assessment services at a level of performance defined by a standard (ISO 10667-2, 2011).

personnel selection psychology--which prescribes that only observable behavior, and not derived characteristics or traits, is the testable object of psycho-diagnostic research; 'you don't have to understand what someone has; I consider it more important that you see it and signalize it' (professional 10). In personnel selection assessments, competencies displace the more easily ascertainable formal job descriptions of tasks and responsibilities since they are assumed to underlie such functional requirements; 'the job profile colours the vacancy and where someone will be placed, but I focus on competencies only' (psychologist 3). Additional selection criteria formulated in the language of competencies, required to perform the job successfully and transcending hard term criteria such as degrees or work experience, are supplied by the offering party or suggested by the expert to the firm and helps 'the client to name the job; or even better, to name the competencies which belong to the job' (psychologist 7). Most respondents regard competencies as reflections of 'all sorts of things underneath' (psychologist 13) and focus explicitly on what lies beneath the observation in assuming that behavior and emotions are expressions of deeper hidden traits. The paradigm of test psychology assumes that traits, like scientific laws, form a hierarchical system in which one has to search for a higher order disposition in order to explain lower order traits, 'and hence the whole range of the person's behavior' (Watkins, 1952:39).

Experts use work samples<sup>60</sup> like role play, leaderless groups, oral presentations, in-basket<sup>61</sup>, or fact-finding to evoke the desired behaviour and observe it in order to deduce the existence of higher characteristics. For example, 'problem solving' is 'for a large part determined by intelligence,' while 'adaptability or friendliness shows a lot of personality underneath' (psychologist 3). By additionally using the instrument of simulations, test psychologies act in line with the regulatory professional rule that 'characteristic descriptions must be recorded in terms of the subject's observable activities' (Groot, 1980) because dispositions are no more than postulated hypotheses and constructs<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Thornton and Rupp (2004) define assessment centers as a method of evaluating performance with a set of assessment techniques where at least one is a simulation (p. 319). Key features of assessment centers are the analysis of relevant job behavior and its classification into dimensions or competencies, the use of multiple assessments and job-related simulations to elicit behaviors, the use of multiple assessors for each participant trained assessors, behaviorally anchored rating scales, first report observations which are then discussed in order to come to a consensus, and the integration of data in accordance with professionally accepted standards (Joiner 2000, ISO 2011).

<sup>61</sup> In the in-basket exercise, candidates have to give priority to several different e-mails, telephone calls, documents and memos, react to them, and organize their working schedule accordingly in a limited period of time (Seegers, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> A construct is a 'postulated attribute of people' assumed to be reflected in a test performance (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; 284). People who possess this attribute will, with a stated probability, act in situation X in a manner Y. The construct is displayed by the overt behaviours which are observed by assessors, and which 'are best conceptualized as a sample set of indicators for the constructs of interest' (Arthur, Day & Woehr, 2008:106).

which are not based on observations (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006). Like in a laboratory (Coon, 1993), the assessment assignment controls and arranges various standardized stimuli to induce the presentation of skills, and the observer quite passively report her or his observations leading to a quantified and standardized output. Experts try to limit themselves to being a simple recorder and stick to observing and registering the direct behavior of the assessee since 'we know from the literature that the accuracy of the predictions of the simulations is rather low, but that you can use them for getting to know how someone reacts. You measure at skill level can someone listen, can he react?' (psychologist 9). The use of a practical assignment such as checking one's elementary writing skills is generally considered to be a laughing stock when selecting for managerial jobs--although 'it would be strange to discover that someone totally can't write and to say 'well I did not check;' although, people expect that for 1,500 euros' (psychologist 8). Assertions concerning more complex dimensions measured in assessment exercises are rarely subjected to psychometric study, as is done with intelligence or personality testing; and the claims about what dimensions are being measured are often taken at face value (Arthur, Day & Woehr, 2008). Respondents stick to describing and signaling what is seen and refrain from making references to underlying constructs, since 'you mustn't dig too deep, where it all stems from isn't our business. How someone is at the moment, how does he look' (psychologist 1). The art of actually writing that down is perfectly in line with the positivistic paradigm of psychometrics, while failing to satisfy the clients' need for traits and potentiality assessment instead of that of overt behavior. When experts bring personnel selection back to its very basics in order to safeguard validity, it is unlikely that employers accept that only overt behavior will be assessed in selections where highly trained and expensive professionalism do not seem to be required.

For personnel selection, the competence profile is essential for deciding the adequate type and number of assessment instruments, and for comparing selection results with it. The competence profile not only determines what instruments will be used, but also how the gathered test data and observations will be interpreted. In spite of their use of the validity generalization of assessment results over circumstances (as is indicated in the studies of Schmidt and Hunter (1998) and Ryan et.al (1999) making performing analyses on a specific job context actually unnecessary), respondents regard performing job analyses as an indispensable activity, an 'Achilles heel' or 'weakness' (psychologist 3) in their daily work since the assessment results have to be interpreted in the job context. The attributes are summarized in a competence profile of six to ten separate competencies<sup>63</sup> which are operationalized into observable behavior, and measured by

<sup>63</sup> The partitioning of the ideal job type into competences can be seen as a control technique by separating a whole into independent units which subsequently can be administered (Foucault, 1977).

the use of simulations. In contrast to professional standards for single psychological tests, experts lack a professional standard for the assembly of an adequate assessment battery. One dimension or competence is often assessed with the aid of different instruments, and each instrument can include several different dimensions to be assessed (Chen, 2006)<sup>64</sup>. Studies on the assessment of managerial performance produced 168 different dimension labels from 34 assessment centres (Arthur, Day, McNelly & Edens, 2003), and 129 dimensions or competencies from 48 assessment centres (Arthur, Day & Woehr, 2008)--from which it is lightly noted that it seems unlikely that 129 to 168 different dimensions are required to explain management behaviour<sup>65</sup>. Research indicates poor and insufficient construct validity<sup>66</sup> as a key weakness of simulation exercises in assessment centres measuring competencies (Oliver, Hausdorf, Lievens & Conlon 2014, Meriac, Hoffman & Woehr 2014, Chen 2006, Binning & Barrett 1989, Cronbach & Meehl 1955). Inadequate construct validity entails that the dimensions to be measured are invalid indicators of the desired work success behaviour. On the basis of empirical studies between 1982 and 1996, Lievens (2002) concludes that the variance in test behaviour ratings is due to a poor construct validity within assessment centres. Meta-analyses of the predictive validity of assessment centers show only modest range validities from .25 to .39 (Gaugler, Rosenthal, Thornton & Benton 1987). In an attempt to improve construct validity, experts try to develop better assessment designs, to train assessor skills, to use behaviorally anchored rating scales, and to limit the number of dimensions per exercise (Arthur, Day & Woehr 2008, Lievens 2002). However, being aware of assessment bias or faults is not a guarantee against doing them.

Psychological tests in Industrial Psychology enable personnel selection psychologists to measure an applicant's competencies in a reliable and 'very precise' manner, like 'a pair of scales' (psychologist 1). Yet the question of 'you can measure your weight accu-

<sup>64</sup> It is expected from assessment centers that the same dimension across the exercises will have a high rate of correlation (convergent validity), whereas different dimensions within the same exercise will correlate less or not at all (divergent validity, Chen 2006).

<sup>65</sup> The assessment centres generally applied elementary perspective on separate dimensions is in contrast to a holistic view of personality which starts from the idea that personality can only be assessed globally (Magnusson & Toerestad, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> According to Cronbach and Meehl (1955), the concept of construct validation is developed to replace predictive validity when no adequate criteria are available. Construct validity functions as an indirect measure of a criterion by determining an underlying trait of test performance. Although the external criterion in personnel selection--future job performance--is obvious, it is not easy to attain. Construct validity predicts the relation of the test score to some construct and permits the diagnostician to predict performance with respect to new, not yet empirically studied criteria by using a nomological network and to decide on the appropriateness of inferences that are drawn from the test's scores (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement in Education 1999, Society for Industrial and Organizational Inc. 2003). Both theory about the criterion and the test data belong to this network of 'associations and prepositions' and are part of the prediction.

rately to the gram, but what are you going to use this information for' (psychologist 1) is one that is inadequately answered by Industrial Psychology, and remains moreover 'a clinical prediction' (psychologist 1). Actually, reliable measurement instruments can only be used when validity qualities are established so that it is ensured that they ascertain what they are supposed to in order to adequately predict future job performance (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006). In practice, respondents are left to their individual 'clinical' insights to solve the validity problem of their assessment results. The established concept of competencies does not automatically mean that it is clear what content these competencies have, how their mastery can be measured, and what is exactly required in a job. When formulated in 'catch all terms' like 'is he able to listen or is he commercial enough' (psychologist 8) or 'the candidate can't manage' (psychologist 3), expert, client and candidate can all have a different understanding of competencies so that it must be made 'concrete' (psychologist 3) by asking the client what he or she exactly means. The expert translates standard competences or the selection criteria offered by the client into observable behavioural terms, trying to reach 'an agreement on its contents' by doing so (psychologist 3). In the translation of an ever-changing range of mainly managerial jobs within administrative organizations for which job profiles are less descriptive and fixed, communication mistakes and compromises emerge when one 'relates these competencies with your own, you've to be creative as a consultant' (psychologist 7). The translation of job requirements into competencies, and the synchronization of a client's business language with an expert's professional competencies language is a delicate process--vulnerable not only to misinterpretation, but also to the demands of clients who are allowed to use their own terms in order to stay satisfied, like the client who 'actually means 'networking' but wants to have the label 'built contacts' on it. Okay, then we'll do it that way (psychologist 7). Establishing competence profiles seems to appeal more to the creativity and communication skills of the experts than to fixed, objective, and standardized procedures.

#### ■ Dealing with flaws

Despite validity flaws in psychometric technology, respondents report little distress about the imperfection of their tools and feel supported by their powerful paradigm. Sennett (2008:10) argues that imperfect tools 'draw on the imagination' and provide challenges for individual experts in their daily practice, yet the different interpretations of professional rules for objective measurements demonstrated by respondents who all pretend to act right, appear in conflict with the psychometric rule of standardization.



## Triangulation

### -Fragment 17

**Psychologist 6:** *I learned in my study that the combination [of instruments] is often the best predictor. An interview is too small. It predicts, I believe, only 30% or something. Personality questionnaires also round the 30%. I believe that intelligence is something like 50%, and then you've also got the small part of behavior.*

The in this study reported personnel selection assessments strongly differ in the number and type of applied instruments depending on the used 'methodology'--since some agencies 'work in a much more behavioral fashion, meaning that we do much more role playing and fewer tests,' while 'with the more classical methodology you also use test results to determine if someone is suitable or not' (psychologist 6, freelancer). The psychometric paradigm does not provide for any other guidelines except the general statement that more instruments increase the predictive validity of the assessment--so that 'the more you put together, the better;' and 'what also helps (to improve prediction) are tests that don't overlap too much and predict different things (psychologist 13). Extended assessments consist of intelligence tests which assess analytic qualities, work samples and interviews which measure competencies, and personality questionnaires which assess personality traits; so that 'you go wrong' when you measure 'learning capacities at the working and thinking level' in your interview since the 'IQ test' is 'the hardest method' (psychologist 3) but respondents fail to answer how comprehensive extended assessments need to be. The expert in fragment 18 renders certain degrees of predictive value from the Schmidt and Hunter study in regard to commonly used selection instruments, but is unable to quantify the validity of combined multiple measurement instruments since that 'would be a guess' (psychologist 15), as these psychometric qualities are not shown with every combination of instruments. Fragment 18 illustrates that experts have limited access to unambiguous empirical-statistical facts in social science, and are offered no better alternative than to rely on the adage that the more instruments you use, the higher the validity becomes. The assignment to assess rather vague and not easily measurable 'latent variables' or traits (Borsboom, Meelenbergh & Van Heerden, 2003) like 'abilities', 'personality', 'performance', or 'preferences' adds (as a result of their degree of uncertainty and difficulty) to a 'strong methodological focus' in test psychology (Islam & Zyphur, 2006), motivating test psychologists to measure extensively without much second thought in order to deal with uncertainty in selection predictions, especially in the case of rejections--where the expert makes a decision 'with huge personal consequences for the person, and must be able to defend it very well' (psychologist 5). Respondents proudly refer to the size of their assessments, which increases with the importance of the managerial jobs and is as broad as the client's finances permit and how much he 'wants to pay for it'

(psychologist 3). Respondents do not only differ in the number and combination of applied tests and other assessment instruments; they are also less explicit as to which instrument is connected to what competence since 'it's all mixed up' (psychologist 7) in an attempt to efficiently measure as many competencies as possible with the least amount of instruments. A lack of clarity in the coherence between the applied assessment instruments and the competencies being measured reinforces the professional image of the all-knowing expert.

Triangulation in extended assessments largely covers 'five instruments:' an interview, an intelligence test, two simulations (a role-play, and an in-basket or another insight demanding assignment), and a personality questionnaire. It offers some form of a solution for the poor construct validity that is in line with the professional standard, and compensates for the weakness of single, less valid instruments; however, it entails the risk of conflicting data which is like 'a compass at the North pole: it sways in all directions (psychologist 15). A common strategy for candidates who claim to be wrongly rejected is the offer of a retry or second chance to pass the selection assessment--which actually implies that their failing is not due to a lack of quality, but rather of the assessment instruments. Respondents tone down the accuracy of assessments that can only measure what is displayed, but which cannot draw conclusions about what is not observed, so that 'you have to interpret in a very good way, Re-translate' (psychologist 9) because 'it is unlikely that one day of selection assessment will cover all of the aspects of a candidate' (psychologist 5); and after a day of testing 'from 8.30 till 18.00, the candidate will be worn out, meaning that the information at the end of the day becomes more and more inferior' (psychologist 1). Assessments can create stress for candidates since 'an assessment is a totally different environment than normal life, maybe you're a totally different person when you're stressed out' (psychologist 8), and 'because of this, sometimes candidates aren't presented in the right way, they've more to offer than I observe right now' (psychologist 5). Because the stressful character of personnel selection assessments can hinder candidates from performing as they would normally do to different extents, experts are not sure about the exact value of the gathered selection results when candidates are too stressed. Test psychology designed two models--a classic and a modern one--to distinguish the relationship between the true score and the unavoidable errors in the measurement of personal characteristics (Ter Laak, De

Goede & De Goede, 2008<sup>67</sup>). The classic fault model estimates the influence of stress on the total assessment performance of candidates and considers it as an unwelcome disturbance that has to be minimized, while the modern fault model figures out how the underlying 'stress sensitivity' trait interferes with each test item. Unlike both statistical models, it is unclear for most experts how variables like stress interfere with the assessment results in daily practice--which keeps them in uncertainty about the accuracy of their selection assessments, and which makes them try to avoid as many disturbances and mistakes as possible.

### Poor instruments

#### -Fragment 18

**Professional 10:** *Sometimes you've got a certain number of competencies for certain jobs. Let's say we have seven competencies. The instruments are then put in such a way that you still have five to check in the interview ... so that you've got at least enough information to write the report.*

Although it is generally acknowledged from the studies of Schmidt and Hunter (1977) and Ryan et.al. (1999) that intelligence tests are the best predictive instruments in personnel selection and are in the top position of the assessment instrument validity hierarchy, they are unable to measure the large variety of selection requirements and competencies employers ask for. Because psychological tests have hardly changed over the past 60 years (McCourt, 1999), they mostly fall short in measuring 'modern' competencies like social skills, forcing experts to turn to interviews and simulations--the psychometric quality of which is not comparable to powerful intelligence tests as one 'knows that intelligence is the best predictor' (psychologist 9). Because of digital testing, 'candidates do many more things at home: they can log in through the internet' and 'do a lot of these personality questionnaires' (whereas 'intelligence tests still need to be done at the office') (psychologist 3)), freeing extra time for more time-consuming simulations and role plays, and allowing the expert to choose from a broader pallet of instruments. In order to assess all of the required selection competencies, experts seem

<sup>67</sup> Classical test theory is a statistical fault theory which estimates true scores by recognizing and estimating faults, and the purpose is to keep the influence of the error score on the true score as low as possible (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006);  $X_j = T_j + E_j$  (X = observed score, T = true score = expected score over parallel versions of the same test, E = error score, j = assessee).

The modern Item Response Theory (IRT) is a mathematical model for the chances of a valid or positive answer given a certain non-observed, underlying latent trait in regard to a number of items (Mellenberg, 1990). The relationship between the latent trait and the chance of answering correctly can be linear (one trait) or nonlinear (several traits). In contrast to classical test theory--in which every score adds up equally to the sum score --every item is now weighed on the basis of its discrimination parameter (Van den Brink & Mellenbergh, 1998).

to lose sight of the ascertained quality of their assessment instruments--like personality questionnaires and simulations, which are low within the validity hierarchy of selection instruments because of their recognized vulnerability to impression management, but which are still widely used since 'I attach more value to an intelligence test than to a personality questionnaire, but I use them all in my analysis. Only the weight is different' (psychologist 3). It is generally acknowledged that the standardization of the selection interview increases its validity (Schmidt & Hunter 1998, Ryan et.al. 1999). However, the STAR interview method<sup>68</sup> based on the principle that past behavior is a predictor for future behavior is poorly used in practice: 'I use it a lot, but I know from a lot of psychologists that they don't do it anymore' (psychologist 6). The expert in fragment 19 states that the interview is used to measure competencies which cannot be captured by other instruments, so that it seems to turn into a sort of pragmatic recycling bin for left-over competencies in situations where there are too many of them. Respondents see eye to eye in placing the interview at the center of their enumeration of assessment instruments since the trial and error of daily practice shows that it is not 'wise' to only use 'an intelligence test and a role play, and no interview' because it is 'undoable' to write a report and 'a picture of the candidate' (psychologist 9). With the input of interview data and impressions, it becomes possible to 'get to know someone' and to write a personalized selection report--since tests yielding 'objective' data, which in a sense depersonalize the assessee, have to be bolstered by information about the 'true' person who comes forward in an interview. The respondents regard the interview as essential for the personalization and humanization of numerical test data into 'flesh and blood' (psychologist 3) descriptions of the candidate. This somewhat mysterious transformation of hard data into vital data adds to the professional power of the expert who is able to both translate abstract numerical data into meaningful and personified descriptions, and to read overt behavior as a representation of personality and potential. In relation to its relevance for the selection process, most respondents seem to spend only a limited amount of time on interviewing--between a half-hour 'to speak to them truthfully,' to slightly more than one hour for military selection ('since we score eight anchor points' (expert 10)), but 'still manage to make something of a character sketch every time' (psychologist 4)). Only a few respondents mention the importance of the interview as a moment where candidates can take the initiative to address topics which are valuable for them in work.

<sup>68</sup> The STAR (S=situation, T=task, A=action, R=result) is an interview method that tests the qualities of applicants according to a certain order. The applicant is asked to name a situation in the past as an example of a certain quality; to describe one's task or role in it; to name one's actions to solve the problem; and finally to list the results (Broek van den & Verhoeven, 2009).

Since personality results are regarded as 'insufficient', experts want to 'see these scores back again, so you need a role-play too' (psychologist 3) and use another source of less objective data to check the validity of personality scores. The expert who uses an in-basket exercise 'as a further check of the intelligence test (psychologist 4) takes it a step up from the dominant paradigm, and turns things around by applying less valid work samples to verify the results of established intelligence testing. Respondents get even more out of touch with the dominant paradigm when they doubt the 'truthfulness' of intelligence results because it does not correspond with own intuition and experience like psychologist 13, who got a certain test result that 'just isn't right ... that just isn't possible' or the expert who doubts the distinctive utility of intelligence tests for managerial jobs since 'those people are all smart enough, they've proven that over the years,' and takes refuge in observations of 'how effective their demonstrated behavior is' (psychologist 6)--despite the fact that Schmidt and Hunter (1978) always recommend using intelligence tests along with several other instruments in order to reach an adequate degree of validity. It is remarkable that personnel selection psychologists determine the objectivity of test results by relying on their own points of view, and seem to add a new meaning to the adjective 'objective,' revealing an attempt to 'direct the way of thinking about the value' of psychological tests rather than aiming for explanation (Sennett, 2008:137). Although respondents acknowledge that results of poor instruments are not 'decisive' (psychologist 7), they are left little choice in their search for meaningful data but to accept less objective and standardized instruments. With these results, experts are able to turn abstract test data into appealing personal stories and to measure the competencies requested by the client. Despite lack of construct validity, respondents do not report having many second thoughts and appear seemingly unbothered by the possible confusing effects on their professional identity. Nevertheless, to place interviews at the center and operate as a supplementary measurement instrument themselves, respondents make alienating concessions to the dominant paradigm which blur the line between academically trained psychologists and other selection professionals. Although bypassing the regulative rule of objectivity does have repercussions like possible feelings of discontent, uncertainty or even shame, respondents rationalize the justification of their use of psychometrically poor instruments. In the quantification of human abilities, it is tempting to 'equate numbers with objectivity' (Arthur, Day & Woehr, 2008); and yet the 'mathematical expression of human value' (Hoskin & Macve, 1986:113) in selection assessments implies a truth about the latent psychological constructs that are supposed to represent the stable personality traits which underlie actual performance and which are only vaguely defined (Arthur, Day & Woehr, 2008).

## Neutrality

### -Fragment 19

**Psychologist 4:** *Maybe I'm more sharply trained, or maybe others perceive it on an unconsciousness level. My nature is ... I hear it often from people that I observe and really get under someone's skin, sometimes, not always but sometimes. Because you can get a much more complete image. Sometimes you just put yourself forward as the most important instrument. You see it in the intake, the role playing, how at ease someone sits in the waiting room, how someone walks with you, and is quickly at ease. These are very small things to which I don't always pay attention, but when you raise certain issues you can sometimes see a line.*

Diagnosticians differ in individual traits and in the way they perform the diagnostic process of formulating questions, choosing instruments, and providing theoretical explanations (Ter Laak 2011, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede 2008; John & Robbins 1994)--as with the respondent who states that 'it matters how the psychologist behaves; if you're a bit careful, someone reacts very differently than when he is assertive and on top of it' (psychologist 2)<sup>69</sup>. The expert in fragment 20 assumes that he is better in diagnostics than others and that at least some portion of the variance in judgment traces back to the characteristics and concerns of the assessor. Literature warns about biased diagnosticians who are wrongly guided by their first impression, searching for information which supports their first hypothesis, perceiving relationships where there are not, letting themselves be guided by their theoretical preoccupations or stereotypes, and giving too much value to a confirmative test result (Westenberg & Koele, 1993). As the expert in fragment 20 illustrates, the danger of potential bias in measurement does not seem to corrode the self-confidence of experts who are 'very much aware that you don't fill in the report biased' (psychologist 16) and postpone a decision because 'I'm not really objective today, well than you, erm, put it aside; and that just helps' (psychologist 8).

Another source of bias or distortions that undermines standardization in psychometrics is the projection of personalized job images in the design of competence profiles--as with the experts who have the opinion that 'you've to be more of a thinker than a feeler, otherwise you'll be too soft and feel guilty' (psychologist 3) for managerial jobs, or that a management assistant must be 'a robust lady' who really supports 'a manager who surely don't want to do a lot of the office work' (psychologist 7), or that a good sales man 'is an extravert, likes to make sales and to make fast actions, is not too friendly because salesmen mustn't be too friendly, they should sell something at the expense of others' (psychologist 9). Such job descriptions, where complementary ideas of, for

<sup>69</sup> A judgment tells more of the assessor than of the assessed person (Cronbach, 1976).

example, adaptive leadership, feminism in careers, or customer satisfaction seem to not be incorporated, may be convincing with their detailed, fluid and empathic character; but in fact, they lack the empirical evidence which would make these private images really fit the job requirements.

Furthermore, experts are confident of having a decisive role in deciding the relevant competencies for selection--since 'I know reasonably well how the organization functions and what is asked of someone, most of the time I add what I think is important to the profile and am in mutual agreement with the contact person most of the time. I had ten of these before and it was at the same level' (psychologist 3). Convinced of his knowledge and expertise, the expert stops searching for additional information or 'when I know nothing about it, I search the internet' (psychologist 3), possibly distorting the clients' wishes. When the individual expert consciously or unconsciously determines the job profile, the expert takes all of the responsibility and the organization no longer seems to be engaged. Although both expert and client seem satisfied with the able expert in his outline of the competence profile, the neutral position of the expert is lost since the variation in developing job profiles amongst experts does not seem to add to standardization or more solid construct validity. If assessment techniques dispassionately and objectively reported what 'truly is', they would hardly be objected to; but when fallible instruments are taken too seriously, and their nature becomes simultaneously 'to describe and prescribe' (Hoskin 1996:267-269), they end up being good measuring tools.

### Slow learning

#### *-Fragment 20*

**Psychologist 14:** *(Sighs) Yes, I actually started from zero. I copied mainly from others and followed some short courses or programs, but that was just a few times a training day and then, erm, I already worked, so okay (laughs), I knew very little of the profession, lacking an organizational psychology background.*

**Interviewer:** *So you built your knowledge from experience?*

**Psychologist 14:** *Yes, indeed.*

This fragment illustrates that basic psychometric principles may be learned at university; however, to apply these takes more time and training since the standards for repairing flaws in psychometric technology are not available. The expert started her work as a personnel selection psychologist 'from zero', largely unaware of possible mistakes; besides additional training, the profession has to be learned in practice by 'yourself'. Respondents mention having followed additional training in STAR interview skills, communication, interview protocol, interpersonal sensitivity, role play assess-

ment, writing reports, traits or personality theory, or tests and statistics theory. Even for those respondents who intentionally choose a career in personnel selection and attain a basic knowledge of psychometrics validity and test reliability after completing psychology, becoming an all-around personnel selection psychologist demands a trajectory of imitation and a 'satisfactory' evolution of skills; so that 'now, a couple of years later, you understand how it works even better' (psychologist 14). Expertise in personnel selection is learned in practice by gaining experience through trial and error in order to develop skills in collaboration with the work process, and therefore perfectly fits the criteria of slow training and habit in craftsmanship (Sennett, 2008). In their search for direction, new test psychologists turn to senior, more experienced colleagues; because of commercial reasons, the sharing of knowledge is mostly done within the organization. Senior colleagues embody professional standards and authority in the face-to-face transferring of knowledge to the less experienced <sup>70</sup>, which according to Sennett (2008:247) may be 'infinitely preferable' to a lifeless, static code of practice as experience makes them less rigid and more open to 'oddities and particularities' but lacks the for personnel selection essential standardization and objectivity. At least two generations of test psychologists have developed similar skills during the past sixty years--a period dominated by the long-lasting positivistic psychometric paradigm, whose leading textbooks for graduates have not changed much after the first publication of Thorndike's authoritative introduction to 'Personnel selection: Test and measurement techniques' (1949), a text whose message strongly influenced Dutch Industrial Psychology (Verhoeven 2008, Ter Laak, De Goede & Goede 2008, Drenth & Sijtsma 2006, Bloemers 1998). Through a process of imposed 'professional jurisdiction' (McCourt, 1999), tutors create a professional identity and 'monopoly' over a legitimized body of knowledge and competencies (Hoskin & Macve, 1986:133), as is shown by psychologist 3 when he claims he was 'raised by the old Van den Berg'. Test psychology in practice is modeled by experience and by senior colleagues who transfer their skills and their knowledge capital of day to day selections down from one generation to another. Administering reliable and valid psychometric instruments, and applying numerical rules for calculating final results are not difficult to learn; however, adopting adequate observation, interviewing and interpreting skills takes much more time. Since the standards of the positivistic paradigm insufficiently prepare one for daily working life, test psychologists have to spend time learning skills which, at least superficially, resemble those applied by less scientific professionals in the field of selection and recruitment. Respondents dare to conclude that 'so I ... I personally think that you don't, erm, that's really very thin ice as they say, that you've got to be a psychologist' (professional 10), and that it is not necessary to have an academic or psychological

<sup>70</sup> Highly specialized skills represent not just a laundry list of procedures but also a culture formed around these actions (Sennett, 2008:107).

background to perform personnel selection because the 'job is simple' and not academically challenging enough (psychologist 17, retired). Ironically, while the majority of 'scientific' selection agencies conduct interviews and use the same, best-available psychological tests-- as well as similar development simulation assessments--the difference between them is the unique way that their individual professionals combine and interpret the assessment data, which is in contrast to the preferred standardization of the empirical-statistical model.

#### ■ Review

In their pursuit for objective personnel selection decisions, test psychologists must be able to depend on the reliability and validity of their selection instruments as demonstrated in empirical-statistical studies. Although the reliability of selection assessments is reasonably well established and the professional behavior of test psychologists is characterized by a strong adherence to psychometric standardization and recording in order to reduce random errors, professionals face two serious problems with selection assessments in their daily practice: uncertain predictive validity due to a lack of feedback on the later job success of recommended applicants, and poor construct validity of personality questionnaires and assessment assignments (Oliver et.al. 2014, Meriac et. al. 2014, Chen 2006, Binning & Barrett 1989, Cronbach & Meehl 1955). In order to be able to estimate the predictive value of daily selection advice, respondents largely rely on the general findings of meta-studies (Schmidt & Hunter 1998, Ryan et.al. 1999)--with the intelligence test as the undisputed leader of the available assessment instruments, as structural feedback upon the future performance of their recommend job applicants is not or limited available. The issue of poor construct validity for in particular personality questionnaires, unstructured interviews, and assessments exercises--implies that such instruments fail to adequately measure the intended psychological construct or competence. In reaction, respondents agree on living up to the professional principles of standardization as much as possible, expand the number of selection assessment instruments and focus on observable behavior rather than traits. To further compensate and check for inadequate assessment results, they strongly rely on the quality of their personal interview and observation skills--which are considered to be stronger than those of non-academically trained colleagues in the field of personnel selection. It requires long additional real-life training to be able to perform instruments like interviews and simulations, and to combine (conflicting) assessment data.

#### *Coping with daily demands*

Even in the well swept social science corner of Industrial Psychology, an expert's access to reliable instruments and sophisticated psychometric principles--which provide a powerful and firm professional identity--is undermined by validity problems. The

solid psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology and its technical elaborations seem to be actually based on the assumptions (or 'artifacts' (De Wolff, 1993)) that selection criteria are definable, performance is mainly trait instead of situation related, and validation is achievable (McCourt 1999, Kouwer 1997). Practice proves that personnel selection psychologists are forced to work in situations where the norms espoused by the psychometric paradigm and the norms experienced through contact with clients and candidates are incompatible (which Sennett refers to as 'conflicting measures of quality, one based on correctness, the other on practical experience' (2008:52)<sup>71</sup>). Despite their lack of validity, poor assessment instruments are still applied--since the most predictive instruments in personnel selection are thus far unable to measure the enormous variety of selection requirements and competencies employers ask for. In their pursuit to meet their clients' selection criteria at an individual, process, or group and organization level (Chen, 2006), this broad variety of competencies forces the expert to take refuge in less adequate psychometric instruments which are vulnerable to impression management and bias, and which lack definition. This study therefore confirms that in the process of gathering data for selection, the reliability and validity of psychological assessment instruments are considered important but not decisive when choosing appropriate instruments (Ter Laak 2011, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede (2008) as preference is determined by the type of competence to be measured (Evers & Zaal, 1979). In further exploring how respondents deal with flaws in their solid psychometric paradigm, it appears that triangulation is assumed to be an adequate remedy for incorporating less objective assessment instruments, and that experts add their own job criteria, occupational biases and subjective intuition to the interpretation of data. The supposedly neutral expert becomes more actively involved in the selection process when deciding to repair the imperfections of the psychometric paradigm which increases the vitality of the craft at the expense of the standards of professionalism. Respondents seem to act somewhat confused when they delete the most predictive intelligence tests, check results from intelligence testing with less valid assignments, add interviews in order to interpret objective test data, or add role plays to check the results of personality questionnaires since such actions are in conflict with the pursuit of objectivity in the psychometric paradigm.

<sup>71</sup> 'Good-quality work' can mean either how something should be done or making something work. Ideally, there should be no conflict between correctness and functionality; but often, the standard of correctness is rarely reached. It can be frustrating to work only 'just good enough' (Sennett, 2008:45).

### *Lacking reflexivity*

Unlike what might be expected, the administration of selection assessments with poor validity does not stress out the expert, and respondents are prevailingly sure of the accuracy of their selection advice. Respondents regret that further validation of their daily practice is lacking but proceed with their selection activities with an unproven sense of self-efficacy which seemingly accepts that doubting belongs to the job and hardly address the fact that they fall short of generalized standards without taking corrective action. Their self-imposed efficacy seems to inhibit extensive questioning and the examination of imperfections in the selection process. Respondents, hindered by the absence of structural feedback, still believe that they do a good job and justify their unconfirmed belief in their own efficacy by hiding behind the guise of the objectivity and infallibility of their sophisticated psychometric technology. Experts, who have no other option than to make concessions to their psychometric principles in order to be able to accomplish the selection assignment, generally do not experience the discrepancy between paradigm and practice as a source of tension or uncertainty. A dutiful adherence to scientific principles seems to be sufficient justification for a strong belief in their selection competencies--even without actual proof in daily practice--and reinforces self-images of neutral mirrors that will not easily change under these circumstances, and keep the epistemology associated with Industrial Psychology unquestioned (Islam & Zyphur, 2006). Respondents predominantly report being self-confident about their advice as their advanced instrumental approach is supposed to prevent profound faults, and report few mistakes. In a field where experts can only make possible, non-deterministic judgments (Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede, 2008), they seem to underestimate their chances of error, not acknowledging an elementary uncertainty about the actual range of their selection predictions while, according to Sennett (2008), an ability to reflect is an essential element of craftsmanship without which development and new insights are seriously hindered. The psychometric paradigm provides respondents with such a strong sense of professional identity and such a high level of training in objective and standardized work procedures that possible imperfections seem to be overlooked and to not upset them. As awareness of inadequate advice does not appear to pay off much in practice, this can reinforce a modest hesitation to bear responsibility for definite selection advice in respondents, which has an undermining effect for the *raison d'être* of Industrial Psychology. Now it is better understood why the expert in the first fragment of Part Two restricts himself to an enumeration of 'objectively' assessed characteristics of the job applicant without offering a final selection recommendation to the client, since this would possibly outbid the regulative psychometric rule of objectivity. Without necessary supportive feedback, contact with others, and internal reflexivity, test psychologists can be captured in the image of the neutral mirror which the psychometric paradigm offers. Respondents seem to act as if they are

preprogrammed and not very attentive, settling for the status quo without improving the quality of expertise, which are contra-indications of good or healthy craftsmanship. Unrecognized uncertainty about selection advice has an undermining effect on professional identity (Sennett, 2008) and can send selection psychologists into alienation (Roberts, 1991).

### *Paradox of professionalism*

Central to the craft of test psychologists is the psychometric paradigm which defines and strengthens their professional identity and skills while at the same time leads to friction with the demands of candidates, clients and companies. Respondents in this chapter appear to be caught in a paradox of professionalism: in order to act professionally and fulfill their selection task, they have to get away from their rigid tools; however, by doing so, they cease to be the 'scientific' test professionals they are supposed to be of professionalism, and distinguish themselves less from other professionals in the field of human resources. If psychologists entirely adhered to sufficient valid psychometric tools and the objective technology of Industrial Psychology, they would distance themselves from what daily selection processes require and would be less able to operate as adequate professionals for clients. This paradox of professionalism is a daily tragedy that is not easily solved by individual experts who are dedicated to the paradigm of Industrial Psychology and are tied to the commercial interests of the agency where they are staffed. The paradox of professionalism conceals negative consequences for the 'scientific' operating expert who seems to be left with little more than the option to wait and hope for a more prompt perfection in psychometric technology. While from the research data in Chapter One, one should expect that the well regulated and elaborated principles of the psychometric paradigm according to which test psychologists assiduously act provide the necessary foundation for a satisfying sense of 'modest pride' which according to Sennett (2008) is a central element in craftsmanship, a blessing for the individual expert, and a drive for society, analyzing discourses in this chapter reveal essential doubts and uncertainties of professionals in reaction to flaws in the solid psychometric paradigm. An obsessive focus on the pursuit of scientific and objective selection decisions (the 'how' of personnel selection) puts professionals into a lesser role in regards to the assumed infallible selection technology, thereby making them run the risk of becoming depressed, working without inspiration in a vacuum or missing the sense of modest pride which is a feature of what Sennett (2008) calls 'good craftsmanship'.

In sum, the discourses in the first two chapters of this part on results indicate that respondents who work in the daily practice of personnel selection do so according to rules or codes where the pursuit of objectivity is dominant. However, the powerful

psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology fails to offer an adequate foundation for every aspect of daily selections in contact with clients and candidates as the instrumental way of thinking seems to inhibit moral accountability, openness, and reflexivity about mistakes. The inadequacy of the authoritative instruments and procedures of positivistic Industrial Psychology in dealing with demands of daily selection practices and the optimal satisfaction of clients' and candidates' interests has an individualizing effect of internalizing standards and values, which is further explored in the next chapters by presenting four ideal types with various (and at times conflicting) professional self-images and motives in the following chapters. The heuristic instrument of ideal types practically helps to present extreme versions of professional actions by fictional personalities who are caught up in a 'paradox of professionalism'. The four ideal types converge in that they operate according to the dominant psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology, and also in a profound belief in the accuracy of their personnel selection results and advice. However, the data in the previous chapters reveal that practice proves both that psychometrics have imperfections and that others (clients and candidates) actively influence the 'objectivity' of selection processes. As a result of these flaws, each of the ideal type represents a different way of finding a solution for which test professionals are faced with on a daily basis- although these solutions or approaches are rather presented as given facts without much explicit introspection or reflexivity as to what drives the professional--and as to what the effects of their actions actually are. A more detailed analyze of the discourses reveal that the ideal types seem to differ in what they pursuit by psychometrics as the results of their varying personal needs, which is presented in the first paragraphs (Pursuit of ...) of the chapters Three, Four, Five and Six. When their ideals, needs or wishes appear difficult to meet or satisfied in practice in the relationship with science, clients and candidates, (see the second paragraph (Daily practice) of each chapter), and the work still has to be done, the question arises what this discrepancy between ideals and reality does for the craftsmanship of personnel selection specialists which will be reflected on in Part Three.

## 2.3 Selection specialist

*If you try too hard, are too assertive, you will aim badly and hit the target erratically (Sennett, 2008:214).*

A more detailed illustration of the effect of Industrial Psychology's pursuit of scientific objectivity in personnel selection on the working lives and professional identities of test psychologists, is the so-called 'selection specialist' as the first ideal type to be presented. The 'selection specialist' most strongly embodies objectivity and derived instrumental accountability, as is seen with the respondent who actually wanted to become a judge in his younger years so that he could apply 'rational analyses of facts and evidence in order to reach a fair verdict' (psychologist 17). This ideal type is characterized by an avoidance of the less-defined areas of mental health psychology, deliberately choosing the strict field of test psychology in which individuals are 'unbiasedly' assessed, and where logical reasoning supposedly prevails in order to satisfy the expert's need for clarity and objectivity. Of the ideal types presented in this study, the realistic 'selection specialists' most fully internalize the dominant positivistic paradigm of test psychology, regarding the professional standards of quality--as they are formulated by the professional association of psychologists, and as they are stated in handbooks and scientific literature--as being at the forefront of their daily work. They value psychometric technology highly since it produces better, more objective, and quantified predictions, as well as supplying the authority to combine data and match it to relevant job competencies. 'Selection specialists' honestly assume that assessment scores objectively reflect the qualities of the assessee.

### ■ Pursuit of objective quality

#### *-Fragment 21*

**Psychologist 9 (police):** *Language tests, an intelligence test, and a sport test are of course also a part of the selection. That's [next to personality tests and interview results] is the hard procedure. If you don't make it, you're out.*

In two different respects, this fragment exemplifies the ideal type the 'selection specialist' as an extreme representative of test psychologists who compliantly adhere to the 'objectivity' and 'instrumental thinking' of the psychometric paradigm. Firstly, the expert in fragment 21 operates in a field similar to military selection (in which Industrial Psychology has its roots (Smit, Verhoeven & Driessen, 2006)), and regards acting in accordance with statistical-empirical based standards as sufficient grounds for being convinced of the validity of his selection actions. The objective testing of suitability is vital for selecting manpower, meaning that 'motivation is not weighted; I leave that to the candidate' (psychologist 4). By preferably bundling several assessment scores of the candidates into one final number, the candidate is brought back to an

objective numerical entity, and the 'lesser the points [from one till four], the lower you land in the stack' (professional 10)<sup>72</sup>. Numbers and arithmetic rules are used in an attempt to both temper possible professional biases and to reveal the 'truth' to the 'neutral' 'selection specialists' who are sincerely 'curious to know' (psychologist 3)--waiting for decisive input as the more data they have, the better. In order to make adequate selection decisions, the focus of the 'selection specialist' is primarily on collecting and scoring diagnostic information according to the dictated psychometric quality standards (Wood 2001, Grove 2000). Such professional standards prescribe appropriate professional conduct and contribute to a sense of orthodoxy: for example, the classical content of training in personnel selection which is collectively offered by larger selection agencies to experts who are starting out does not address contemporary issues like the internet, webcam testing, or the 'stress hormone cortisol' (professional 10)<sup>73</sup> (Lievens & Boete, 2011). 'Selection specialists' like the expert in fragment 21 give credit especially to intelligence testing as their proven prevailing solid scores are regarded as being 'the most hard' (psychologist 3) within psychometrics, and are known as the most effective predictors of employee performance (Christiansen, Janovics, & Siers 2010; Furnham, Dissou, Sloan, & Chamorro-Premuzie 2007; Schmidt & Hunter 2004; Wanek 1999; Ryan et.al 1999, Schmidt & Hunter 1998; Terpstra & Rozell 1993). 'Selection specialists' preferably start with solid, quantifying intelligence scores when presenting the assessment results to candidates and clients. Most respondents deploy the robustness of the validity and reliability of their assessments instruments--as they are described in publications, test guides and the test committee of the professional association--by weighing their sub-scores differently when estimating a final score. 'Selection specialists' so much adhere to the strict policy of the professional association (which checks the quality of tests) that when 'a test is still uncensored by the COTAN<sup>74</sup>, we don't use it' (psychologist 12).

<sup>72</sup> In order to reveal the 'real' picture of candidates' intelligence, the scores of various intelligence subtests are addressed and mediated (Weinhardt & Vancouver, 2014). Acting in accordance with what is called a 'compensatory model' of combining assessment data through the straightforward addition and mediation of individual test scores (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006) makes the total selection score less dependent on the personal influences of the expert, and enlarges the objectivity and standardization of the selection decision. A variant of the compensatory model, the 'multiple cut-off procedure' or 'conjunctive model'--wherein a critical score or minimum claim is indicated for every test--is widely used by the respondents, despite evidence that the weighing of several characteristics will predict less than the use of the compensatory calculating model (Westenberg, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> Although neuro-research (a trend in the current field of psychology) is not applied in selection psychology, the implementation of physiological assessment instruments would probably not fundamentally change the basic idea that a candidate has certain qualities to be assessed and quantified.

<sup>74</sup> The COTAN, or Commission of Test Affairs, is part of the Dutch Organization of Psychologists and judges the quality of psychological instruments offered by the author in the following dimensions: theoretical foundation, quality of test material, quality of the manual, norm groups, reliability, construct validity and predictive validity (NIP, 2014).

Besides a profound trust in numerical test data, fragment 21 further illustrates that ideal type the 'selection specialist' promotes selection merely for its own merits and not for any assumed effects on organizational or individual performance. In contrast to what critical Industrial Psychology claims (Islam & Zyphur, 2006), the daily activities of the 'selection specialist' are not prescribed by management or worker interests since 'the best thing is that I only give advice, the client lays his own judgment next to mine' (psychologist 13). As test results are undisputed, and as the daily activities of 'selection specialists' are dominated by the scientific paradigm in defining the quality of the match between applicant and job, the expert in fragment 21 is not inclined to make any concessions for job candidates and has no disputes or close relationships with either candidates or clients. When an expert's actions are optimally in line with a clear set of prescribed procedures and professional standards, 'the easiest thing is that you only have to conduct' (psychologist 7): the work is adequately instrumentally accounted for, meaning that both client and job candidate can be reassured of the impartiality and accuracy of the selection assessment. The well-established and conscientiously-met theoretical framework of Industrial Psychology forms the leading principles for the accountability of the ideal type the 'selection specialist' who does not transcend this instrumental level. The 'selection specialist' is focused on doing the job right, setting the selection test battery, gathering information and reasoning out the result--which demands one's full attention, time, and energy, but which makes conducting selection assignments a rather isolated act of professionalism in which only the assessment of data is considered important.

### ■ Daily selections

#### -Fragment 22

**Interviewer:** *How were you trained for this profession?*

**Psychologist 15:** *I studied psychology, and, erm, I'm 53 years old now, so it's a while ago that I did that. I did experimental psychology and wanted to become a neuro-psychologist. Well, that evidently didn't work out.*

Powerful psychometric technology set a standard of 'objective perfection,' although respondents report that daily selections do not meet these expectations. Despite their strong and long tradition of allowing for the optimal performance of standardized and reliable selection assessments, psychometrics appear less perfect to professionals in practice. As we could see in Chapter 2.2 test psychologists face problems such as the lack of adequate and valid assessment instruments, conflicting data, the absence of structural feedback on actions, and the need to translate 'objective' numerical test scores into meaningful data--which troubles the self-image of the ideal type 'selection specialist' of being scientific and logical operating professionals. The expert is forced to



settle for and to 'try to reach an as good as possible prediction' (psychologist 6) in a context where the accuracy of professional actions is not structurally checked. The expert in fragment 22 seems to suggest that personnel selection and psychological testing is a less proper science than neuro-psychology--what she actually wanted to choose, but which did not work out. Now she works within the psychometric paradigm, which cannot be denied to have limitations and which can turn subversive (or as Sennett (2008:97) argues, 'cruel')--especially for the ideal type 'selection specialists' with their sincere driving motive to pursue objective quality. The disturbing amount of uncertainty rising from such imperfection and such lack of feedback can create a sense of inadequacy and failure, although any tension is denied (or at least not frequently mentioned) by the respondents during the research interviews. Industrial Psychology's dominant reaction to uncertainty coming from the unavoidable mistakes in selection assessment by failing technology is and has always been an even stronger adherence to psychometric principles like standardization and recording, resulting in efforts to improve instruments to combat structural faults in measurement and to increase homogeneity in the preparation of and attending to selection candidates in order to reduce random errors (Bolander & Sandberg, 2014). 'Selection specialists' conscientiously follow professional rules in order to reduce mistakes in selection as much as possible, which makes them feel adequately equipped to accept responsibility for performing the difficult task of demarcating suitable from unsuitable applicants.

### -Fragment 23

**Interview:** *How do you interpret test results?*

**Psychologist 11:** *I can't give one answer. There's not a method you can follow. No.*

Personnel selection psychologists are able to substantially measure human aspects in a reasonably stable manner and to compare them with differentiated norm groups, but the consequences of the thus obtained scores are not highly recorded (Ter Laak, 2011). As the expert in fragment 23 confirms, the interpretation of systematic gathered assessment data is one of the least defined and standardized activities in Industrial Psychology. The act of interpreting data can vary with every selection case--as we see with conflicting data where 'you can't mediate and cut it into two, so you really have to think of an alternative explanation' (psychologist 9). Adequate recording, combining, and interpreting of extended selection data is barely touched upon in individual test manuals, professional codes of conduct, and selection handbooks. Although the Dutch Association of Psychologists (NIP, 2013) highlights the fact that a qualitatively good test is not a guarantee of a good psychological assessment since the result of a selection assessment depends 'decidedly' on the psychologist who administers the test, assesses

the information, and writes the report<sup>75</sup>; the association does not provide unequivocal practical outlines for the process both of analyzing assessment data and of matching it to pre-set job profiles. Protocols are lacking so 'you've got to learn it yourself; it's indeed semi clinical' (psychologist 3). Respondents have to face the rather subjective and 'difficult' (psychologist 6) challenge of deciding which results are more 'true' when candidates perform incongruently or erratically on the same dimension across the several tests, simulations and interview, and produce contradictory information which can create a source of conflict for the rational selection specialist. For this 'technical dilemma' of irregular assessment data<sup>76</sup>, numerical rules of combining data are difficult to apply so respondents 'consider the pros and cons carefully' (psychologist 3), and look for variables behind the conflicting data such as the influence of stress, black-out, or potentiality that might be responsible for underperformance. In this process of pondering, deviating lower scores are regarded as being mistaken, and are deleted in favor of the more positive scores which are supposedly not influenced by underlying variables and are therefore more 'true'. Respondents assume that candidates (whose intelligence or ability level is established as being sufficient through intelligence testing or interviews) perform moderately or poorly on selection assessments because of either unrevealed potential or a lack of the experience that is necessary for the adequate development of their skills--meaning that these candidates are as yet unable to exhibit their abilities during assessment assignments. To determine potentiality, respondents assume that tests and interview scores are superior to those of simulations; while in the assessment of actual skills, mastery simulation scores are supposedly superior to interview findings. Respondents consider the concepts of stress and potentiality as satisfactory explanations for conflicting data (even though substantial structural feedback on their validity is missing) safely recommending these candidates to clients with the caveat that the organization must offer adequate opportunities and training to the candidates in order for them to fully develop their potential. 'Selection specialists' are less inclined to look for explanations for conflicting scores in biased ratings or poor construct validity because of their firm belief in psychometrics, meaning that neither the 'selection specialist' nor psychometric technology can be blamed. Some of the respondents solve the issue of contradicting data with additional research (which is expensive and time consuming), using the additional data to confirm which of the original data is probably valid--an appropriate approach for 'selection specialists' that highlights the opinion that even though mistakes happen once in a while, psychomet-

<sup>75</sup> The high degree of 'authorization' is inherent to professions like test psychology (NIP Code of Professional Conduct, 2007), but complicates the definition of professional quality and holds personnel selection psychologists personally responsible for their professional acts redundant.

<sup>76</sup> According to Lievens (2002), assessee performance can lack 'cross-exercise consistency' due to one dominant performance factor. Low convergent validity is partially explained, because some assesseees perform differently in, for example, individual or group assignments.

ric technology is not fundamentally in doubt and can thus be applied again. However, time is often lacking for extra assessments since most experts have to form an opinion about a selection case 'in one day' (psychologist 8).

#### *-Fragment 24*

**Interviewer:** *Do you mean that the use of test scores on their own is insufficient for adequate advising?*

**Psychologist 3:** *It depends, that's right; it depends on your aim. So it can, if you want to make a sort of pre-selection. But if you really want to decide if someone is suitable for, okay, a high management position in a certain firm, I would add an interview too.*

**Interviewer:** *What makes you highly value actually speaking to someone, seeing someone?*

**Psychologist 3:** *Seeing thoughts, seeing thoughts. In the interview you see the flesh and blood of the test scores. And also certain competencies are not in the tests. So when they say; 'we want to know if someone has strategic insight' or, erm, etcetera, you simply want to see someone yourself, yes.*

**Interviewer:** *And according to you, an IQ test is an insufficient base?*

**Psychologist 3:** *Yes, indeed.*

Despite its varying validity--which is dependent on the degree of standardization of the interview process (Schmidt & Hunter 1998, Ryan et.al 1999)--interviews are of considerable importance for those test psychologists who assume that they both yield more authentic data than personality questionnaires, and appear to be more useful than intelligence tests when measuring certain competencies. The interview combats impression management by giving a reality check for the presented self-images that may only be true in the head of candidates, and that may be colored by their desire to see or present themselves in a certain way. The expert in fragment 24 not only uses the interview to 'see thoughts' proven by behavior in order to combat impression management in personality tests, but surprisingly (for a positivistic orientated 'selection specialist') takes it one step further by preferring interviews to valid intelligence testing for the assessment of 'strategic insight'. Although the expert values intelligence tests because of their reliability and sound predictive validity, he turns to interviews as an additional assessment instrument because intelligence results are not sufficiently informative about a person of 'flesh and blood'. 'Hard' test data needs to be made meaningful by observations in interviews (or simulations), and is regarded as less relevant or adequate for the accomplishment of certain selection tasks. In the psychometric paradigm, intelligence tests are recorded and empirically-statistically accounted for in a far better fashion than interviews, whose outcome largely depends on the skills and attitude of the interviewer. To prefer an interview to psychological tests implicitly states that technology is subordinate to the expert--who must first compare 'objective' data with his own 'true' personal observations, or his gut feelings like 'I saw her com-

pletely I think' (psychologist 3)--when forming an opinion about the quality of obtained test data. The 'selection specialist' draws the line at intuition that is not confirmed by an assessment instrument, because the positivistic paradigm insists that intuition without empirical proof is a line which cannot be crossed.

This study shows that the 'selection specialist' finds ways of dealing with both the lack of guidelines for the interpretation of sometimes conflicting data, and with the use of less objective assessment instruments which are vulnerable to the 'well known assessment bias' (psychologist 15). These pitfalls of personnel selection diagnostics do not inflict a serious loss of confidence in the psychometric paradigm for the 'selection specialist,' but are rather employed to create new 'possibilities' for additional 'personal interpretation in the estimation of the human factor' (psychologist 15). For 'selection specialists', the aims of the positivistic paradigm to convert the expert into an objective instrument of 'social administration,' and to 'purify' personnel selection psychology from any subjectivity through mathematical descriptions and 'law-like regularities' (Brown, 2012:138-140), seem to be both impossible to realize, and an undesirable simplification of the craftsmanship of personnel selection. Imperfect psychometrics offer the 'selection specialist' the freedom to add their own rational estimations of 'how it's put together,' 'brain twisters in which you must see and find your way' (psychologist 5) and which are 'brain teasing' (psychologist 15) and challenging. The effort to make an intelligent and coherent story out of assessment data avoids boredom involved with possible routine--which, according to Sennett (2008), is inherent to closed systems of rationalism where the stimuli to look for other things that you can do with the technology at hand are less obvious. The absence of standard rules for combining conflicting assessment results, as well as the use of instruments with poor validity, offers the 'selection specialist' the opportunity to apply challenging and satisfying reasoning skills and a rational, step-by-step combination of all sorts of data within a certain job context into consistent advice. This demanding reasoning task puts a burden on the shoulders of the expert, for whom 'it's tough to stay sharp all day' (psychologist 8), but forms a rewarding intellectual challenge. Proudful 'selection specialists' reckon that selection reports composed of purely factual assessment data that is put into tables are inferior to 'real' reports where 'these test results are translated into something I wrote myself' (psychologist 13), and in which the 'essence of the person' is trying to be shown' (psychologist 8). The 'selection specialist' finds satisfaction in writing a report on the suitability of a job candidate where the results of the expert's individual reasoning are reflected. In selection reports, to which respondents 'never' look forward to but experience 'a lot of satisfaction' when finished (psychologist 6), 'selection specialists' operate as intelligent directors in the management of the divergent data from 'my assessments'

(psychologist 3) and reveal the 'real' person<sup>77</sup>. The results of the expert's observations and interpretations are carefully written down in addition to the tagged data (at which 'clients tend to always look first' (psychologist 8)). Digitalized or standard reports feel almost like an affront for 'selection specialists,' since these exclude experts from the meaning-creating and decision-making process and make them unable to deploy their analyzing abilities. The substitution of 'manual craftsmanship with machines' and 'white collar labour for intelligent electronics' (like digital tests in personnel selection) allows for a movement towards the perfection of work outcomes due to the unbeatable quality of technology--but also has, according to Sennett (2008:81), a 'personal price' as it diminishes 'the mental understanding of its users'.

Paradoxically, once it has been sent to the employer with the candidate's permission, the selection report becomes the most visible aspect of the personnel selection process, while simultaneously reflecting the little-expressed and hard-to-see of the combination of the individual data by the expert. 'Selection specialists' do not feel vulnerable or insecure when they expose the results of their individual logical reasoning process within the report: as selection reports are expected to reflect objective data, experts trust their rationalizing abilities and consider their reports to be 'real' (psychologist 6) and objective. It is not remarkable for a 'selection specialist' to use the word 'real' in reference to the part of the report which was personally written by the expert, as they assume that their contributions are equally objective as test results. A 'selection specialist' does not show concern about the quality of the specialist's selection actions, demonstrating the full trust that the author has in his or her own objectivity and logical skills, and asserting that there is no 'human factor' distorting bias within the assessment. In their superior position, professionals can easily become paternalistic--as is seen with the respondent who compliments a candidate because 'he works very fast and accurate,' which is 'very decent' (psychologist 3)--while the 'selection specialist' ideal type is supposed to be a neutral observer who only administers the process. The sense of superiority for the 'selection specialist' seems to grow over the years--as is seen with the respondent who states that 'now that I'm almost fifteen years into it I just know' (psychologist 6).

<sup>77</sup> Respondents regularly report having trouble getting started with the report since writing personalized selection reports in an autobiographical style requires certain literary qualities, which not all experts possess. It is known that the well-known Dutch writer Simon Carmiggelt, who later specialized in writing short portraits of ordinary people, edited assessment reports at the former selection agency 'Psycho-Technique' in Amsterdam at the start of his career. He was hired to rewrite and personalize rather unappealing reports by test professionals. Simon Johannes Carmiggelt was a Dutch writer who lived from October 1913 until November 30th 1987 (Wittebom & Berg, 1998)..

### -Fragment 25

**Psychologist 3:** *No, you've got to learn it yourself and, erm, it's indeed semi-clinical as we say. Erm, I sometimes make, when I work with more advisors and freelancers on the same project, I develop a work procedure, since you've got a problem when you state that someone must have an average intelligence, but what is average? Is that a 4 or 4.5<sup>78</sup>? Then we just make arrangements, because you don't want to be treated very differently by various advisors, use the same norm groups. Despite the procedure, you still have space for interpretation; but the process itself stays of course reasonable, erm, semi clinical regarding what you focus on, on all those sources, and makes a coherent story out of it, yes.*

Fragment 25 shows that some numerical arrangements have to be made beforehand when several 'advisors and freelancers' work on the same selection project in order to reduce the risk of subjectivity in the decision-making process, and the potential subversive influence of individual experts on the 'true' selection outcome. Although the existence of subjectivity is not denied by the expert in fragment 25, who refers to it with the adjective 'semi clinical', he tries more or less to hide it from clients and candidates in order to protect the neutral and objective image of selection psychology which others expect. Moreover, a so-called 'risk protocol' superficially accounts for unprofessional-looking subjectivity by formalizing judgments when there are more consultants working on one same selection assessment project to prevent 'a lot of trouble, for sure with a larger number of say forty candidates,' though 'if we only have one candidate for one job it's of less importance' (psychologist 7). The protocol registers the minimum required score for each job competency beforehand to prevent a different interpretation by individual consultants and to conceal a possible lack of 'objectivity'. When candidates score lower than any of these minimum scores, they are unsuitable for the job on the assumption that the obtained assessment results are 'real' and reveal the 'essence' of the candidates. In the work of 'selection specialists,' subjectivity is present and made visible by the use of protocols and interviews. Fragment 25 illustrates that 'selection specialists' are personally involved in the selection process, however, the 'clinical eye' (which 'differs for each psychologist') is acknowledged by 'selection specialists' but reduced to an individual focus 'on the back story,' which depends on the input of the candidate (psychologist 1). 'Selection specialists' differ from each other 'clinically' as a result of the plurality of selection contexts--meaning that although the acquired assessment data may be selective, the process or interpretation of these results into a 'coherent' picture is supposedly rational and objective.

<sup>78</sup> Psychological tests can measure on a stanine scale varying from 1 to 9 with a mean score of 4, 5 or 6 (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006).

### ■ Review

Important themes in the daily work of the ideal type 'selection specialists' are 'objectivity' and 'instrumental thinking'--both of which stem from their thorough identification with and administration of the principles of the powerful psychometric paradigm. By means of these 'objective' administered instruments, 'selection specialists' can detect the 'true' competencies of job candidates, meaning that they will be able to decide how well candidates match the job profile of an employee. The 'selection specialist' is best characterized by the pursuit of neutrality through the implementation of 'approved' psychometric technology when important personnel decisions have to be made for employers. The straightforward 'selection specialist' relies on the empirically-based accumulative predictive value of a well-chosen combination of intelligence testing, preferable standardized interviewing, and simulations (Schmidt & Hunter 1998, Ryan et.al. 1999).

### *Perfection*

This ideal type seems to be a strong example of what Sennett (2008) describes as the 'craftsman who strives for quality and perfection'. Working intentionally and energetically according to the principles of the impressive tradition of the paradigm of objective testing provides a powerful guidance for what is right and wrong, as well as a proud identity of professional authority. From their perspective, mistakes and the corresponding burden of being responsible for a false recommendation seldom occur as 'selection specialists' believe in the perfection of their approach and instrumentation. Because of their belief in objectivity, 'selection specialists' trivialize the effect of impression management and largely disregard disagreements from candidates and employers. Despite sincere intentions for objective selections, putting them into practice proves to be difficult and threatens to become less perfect for 'selection specialists' when the administration of assessment instruments with dubious construct validity is necessary in order to resolve a selection task, and when the guiding general 'scientific' standards are missing for the integration of all the acquired assessment data into one selection recommendation. These limitations in the technology of Industrial Psychology invite 'selection specialists' to develop individual and therefore subjective approaches towards selection assignments. In order to be able to reach a coherent recommendation, a strong appeal must be made for the logical reasoning and analyzing skills of individual 'selection specialists,' who must decide for themselves about the weight and combination of the sometimes conflicting assessment data. Instead of being a threat to the strict pursuit of 'selection specialists', psychometric flaws seem to be transformed into a rather challenging and inherently satisfying activity of observation and reasoning that appeals to a superior level of work. Somewhere along the way, the positivistic 'selection

specialist' adds subjectivity and originality<sup>79</sup> into the mix--which is more difficult to judge by experts, clients, and candidates, but which makes technocratic selection more attractive, appealing and professional. The impact on the individual expert is that considerable training on the job is required to both master the necessary additional reasoning skills and to integrate one's own observations into statistical test data in unique ways, which unfortunately blurs the distinction from other, non- scientific operating professionals in the field of personnel selection.

### *Instrumental accountability*

Especially in larger agencies, where assessments are often strictly standardized and not tuned into specifications, the 'selection specialist' lets technology take the responsibility for the quality of the selection advice, and can lose sight of the eventual malignant effects of a given selection recommendation. The 'selection specialist' acts according to professional procedures for doing the job right, thinks strictly in terms of immediate cause and effect, is curious about the selection outcome that will unfold, but is inclined to disregard individual interests. The quality-driven craftsmanship of the 'selection specialist' in pursuit of the generic allows the expert to be independent and proud, but endangers the expert with the risk of what Sennett calls 'obsessional energy' (2008:243-245), whose possible effects are social isolation, disconnection, and superiority. 'Selection specialists' bear a large responsibility and this social power to reach a successful selection decision can place them in the isolated position of being the only person who fully and truly understands the selection process; which entails the danger of being disconnected from others and denies the 'irretrievably relational character of selfhood' (Roberts, 1991:357). While the well-intentioned focus of 'selection specialists' is to avoid unfairness, (a synonym for subjectivity in the allocation of jobs), their rationality at the same time leads to a certain disregard for employers and job candidates, who are mainly seen as sources of valuable information to be explored in the complex decision-making process of quantifying human qualities; however, after delivering their advice, experts are acquitted from any consequences since it is no longer in their hands. 'Selection specialists' operate independently and treat candidates as passive subjects who are there only to be objectively assessed. They do not bow to inappropriate demands from interfering clients and only instrumentally accounted for critiques from candidates or clients. By focusing on procedures, the 'selection specialist' is satisfied with the status quo (McCourt, 1999), and overlooks the possible moral consequences of their advice on others so moral and ethical concerns remain in the

<sup>79</sup> Originality is something where there was nothing before, and arouses in us the emotions of wonder and awe (Sennett, 2008:70). Originality is the trait of single, lone individuals' (Sennett, 2008:66).

background (Islam and Zyphur, 2006). The craft of selection asks for one's full attention and energy, and the 'selection specialist' is not focused on what becomes of the candidate or client after the selection--or of any potential harm done. Absorbed into a 'scientific' self-image, the expert seems to underestimate the consequences of merely logically defended selection actions in which the other is largely uninvolved. Impelled by excitement, curiosity, or a sense of professionalism in their pursuit of objective quality, 'selection specialists' can turn their work into an obsessive passion for generic psychometric standards that do not heed the potential malignant effects of the result of their work on applicants and clients. In return, the expert is not fully understood or appreciated and lacks an open relationship with clients and candidates--which according to Sennett (2008) is actually necessary for healthy professional identity building.

### **Projection**

For the 'selection specialist', the value of 'objective' selections is determined by the degree to which psychometric procedures and principles are followed, which means that any suspicion of subjectivity by the expert, client, or candidate about the selection results is minimized (or rephrased). However, the opportunities that deficiencies in psychometrics offer also nicely suit the intrinsically driven 'selection specialist' so even for 'selection specialists'--whose fundamentally prevailing neutral identity unconsciously dictates that all acquired assessment data is valid and reliable<sup>80</sup>--the classic intuitive-statistical debate does not seem to play any important or hostile role in daily working life as respondents in this study actually consider it normal to require the whole continuum in order to be able to match job and applicant (Ter Laak 2011, Ter Laak, De Goede & De Goede, 2008). When the whole continuum of tests, assignments, observations, interviewing, intuition and logical reasoning are applied in practice this leads to varying combinations of statistic and intuition-based judgments (see also Ter Laak, 2011) of which it is impossible to indicate the degree of uncertainty attached to job success predictions (generally considered a favorable practice in social science), and test psychologists become less distinguishable from other non-academic operating selection professionals who use mainly informal methods. To avoid feeling insecure when acting contrary to the psychometric standards, 'selection specialists' adopt a sense of self-efficacy and professional authority which is not based on the evidence of the effectiveness of their work, but with which they seem to be able to get away with anyway. They are convinced that intuition and subjectivity are turned into objectivity when they act according to the professional standards as much as possible which makes their own contributions to the selection process largely independent of personal

<sup>80</sup> Like the claim that strictly scored projective tests are just as valid as intelligence testing (Meyer et. al. 2002, Wood et. al. 2000).

preferences or biases. Straightforward 'selection specialists' use their strong self-confidence and clear professional identity to turn disconcerting psychometric shortcomings to their own advantage, remaining confident even when they are forced by daily demands to act outside of the psychometric paradigm. Expert and paradigm seem to coincide when experts assume that the objective paradigm gravitates towards the ones who work conscientiously and project their strong convictions of the supposed objectivity of personnel selection assessments onto their own subjective observation and analyzing skills. The professional identity which the psychometric paradigm provides direction and focus in the chaos of everyday working life (Mead, 1982) and resolves the dilemma of unwelcome and subversive subjectivity, which is not without repercussions: a lack of discrimination or distance between the heuristic and objective features of the paradigm leads to a false sense of self-efficacy and satisfaction (respondents hardly mention any unsettling tensions) which has no concrete correcting feedback, supportive empirical evidence. The rational ideal type for the 'selection specialist' administers selection assessments in a self-delusive way in order to avoid doubt and uncertainty, while still feeling able to base predictive judgments<sup>81</sup> on assessment scores which are considered 'true'; however, these scores need a 'neutral' expert to interpret them, to reveal what in a sense is already there and which can be regarded as valid as long as psychometric rules are followed. The lack of transparency in the subjective aspects of the decision-making process is not just a favorable condition for 'selection specialists' to self-delusionally deny or overlook subjectivity when dealing with dysfunctional technology; it also brings 'selection specialists' into the rather isolated position of being able and independent experts who dutifully concentrate on the selection task, but who are not easily understood and who are not easily corrected by the feedback of others (who are kept at a distance). The rather isolated position of 'selection specialists' reinforces their desire to hide unwelcome subjectivity not only from candidates and clients, but also from the experts themselves--so that they do not experience the unpleasant paradox of professionalism they are in. The technocratic and routine craftsmanship of Industrial Psychology offers experts the possibility to put what Sennett (2008) calls their 'individual signature on the work process' while still operating under the guise of objectivity and present it as such to candidates and clients. While 'selection specialists' who strongly adhere to the unequivocal paradigm of Industrial Psychology are suspected of suffering most of all among the presented ideal types from the paradoxical situation they are in--as they have no other alternative than to accept unwanted subjectivity and a decline in their professional standards in order

<sup>81</sup> A judgment is an opinion or decision that is based on careful thought, while a prediction is a statement about events whose actual outcomes have not yet been observed (Van Dale, 2010). Industrial Psychology searches for a correlation between a candidate's present and future performance in order to predict sufficiently, while explaining why these correlations exist seems to be a less pressing question and is generally not an object of study.

to be able to complete the selection task--their self-delusive way of coping prevents this from happening.

Because of the challenges of everyday selection practice, 'selection specialists' transform from rational experts who produce collective and anonymous work into unproven, self-confident, and inwardly tuned 'directors of truth'. Despite their concessions to the paradigm, 'selection specialists' continue to claim to adhere to the rule of objectivity and rationality and thereby prevent unpleasantly experiencing the paradox of professionalism that they are in. This paradox is not forced on them by others (as we shall see with some of the other ideal types), since 'selection specialists' operate independently and are largely in charge of determining the content of the selection process, instead stemming purely from a lack of professional standards and instruments. The professional's pursuit of objectivity can turn into what Sennett (2008) calls an obsession, thereby running the risk of hitting the target (objective selections) wrongly and of having an undermining effect on their professional identity.

## 2.4 Business partner

*A good craftsman is a poor salesman, absorbed in doing something well, unable to explain the value of what he or she is doing (Sennett, 2008:117).*

Test psychologists like the ideal type the 'selection specialist' are driven by professional standards, but in practice professionals also relate with powerful clients and less powerful candidates and appear to differ in how they relate. The second ideal type to present works at the cutting edge between the leading scientific principles of the profession and the interests of business while, like the 'selection specialist', is less focused at candidates. A central motive for the ideal type the 'business partner' to choose a career in Industrial Psychology is the wish to avoid the ambiguity and complexity which is more typical for social assistance working fields of psychology where 'healthy people' and 'business administration' are not likely to be encountered (psychologist 8). The 'business partner' longs for admission to the world of business that controls, like psychologist 15 who 'really' likes her craft because 'you look a lot in organizations, and get to know them if you've a long term contact', and that offers the necessary financial resources. Organizational & Industrial psychology, which traditionally focuses on management and power and less on individuals (Islam & Zyphur, 2006), offers better allowance for internships of psychology students, who generally are charged to devise a psychological questionnaire for their master's thesis, and relatively good career opportunities. It are clients' wishes and commands that are prevailing leading in the daily 'scientific' practice of 'business partners' who 'focus on candidates who are pre-selected by the employer or by the HRM department' (psychologist 7). Of the in this study presented ideal types, the straight 'business partner' mostly takes into account the interests of the ordering party, which is the employer or HRM-advisor of an organization.

### ■ Pursuit of client satisfaction

#### *-Fragment 26*

**Psychologist 5:** *We should do this [getting feedback] more consistent. Due to being swayed by issues of the day, we don't get round always, but we try. We do this to learn from it and to build up a good contact with our customers, because then they'll return. That for sure counts for our practice.*

The expert in fragment 26 refers to the by respondents generally touched upon lack of structural feedback on the validity of their selection predictions, which not only inhibits professional learning but also forms an obstacle in building stable relationships with business since 'we would be stronger when we could say something concrete about the predictive value of our assessments' (psychologist 7). 'Business partners' regret the lack of scientific evaluations of their selection predictions in practice not

primarily because of their potential attribution to the scientific foundation of their work, albeit the main motive for 'selection specialists', but because feedback is expected to enlarge derived customer satisfaction necessary in the competition with other selection agencies. 'Business partners' need affirmation of the surplus value of the validity of their selection advice in order to build enduring relationships with clients on whom the agency depends for its economic survival rather than for pure scientific reasons or professional curiosity. The expert who calls employers after 'one week when the reports are there, if they're satisfied and if they can proceed with it' (psychologist 7) asks for feedback on such short notice that it seems mostly in the service of establishing firm relationships because it is not aimed at the determination of lasting job success or failure of recommended assesses. 'Business partners' prepare ample and delve into organizations to get a 'feeling for the organization, for the kind of person who actually belongs' (psychologist 7), which can take 'three quarter' of the work process, and warn fellow advisors who spend all their time on diagnostics for potential tunnel vision. In their need for recognition and economic prosperity which are leading for their professional identity, 'business partners' depend on the scientific foundation of applied selection instruments and procedures to justify and strengthen their services of quantifying human ability and selecting the best candidates for which employers ask. Clients are persuaded to purchase selection services by selling psychological assessment instruments as 'robots' enlarging expert's assessment powers. The understood demand of clients for evidence on the efficiency of offered and expensive selection services is less satisfied when psychometric instruments would be presented as, in the words of Sennett (2008:85), fallible 'replicates' that mirror the strive for objectivity but leave the door for potential subjectivity or unfairness open. Even despite actually proof, the expert in fragment 26 has profound faith in the predictive validity of his psychometric instruments, which only awaits empirical research to be revealed.

#### *-Fragment 27*

**Psychologist 3:** *I do not blame the client [for wanting cheap but less valid selection assessments] because whether you do one or two role plays, it isn't noticed. Of course, that's very difficult, we're commercial too. You offer several products with several values and predictive values.*

**Interviewer:** *Yes, but do you have an idea about where the limit is. Is that, well, now is this really the minimum for us?*

**Psychologist 3:** *Yes, well, we offer everything, but when you say it's for very important selection decisions, we will always keep seeing candidates ourselves, etcetera, yes.*

Although in comparison to 'selection specialists', 'business partners' act more according to what would be expected from 'social experts' (who incorporate others as mirrors

to account for and focus on one's professional actions (Sennett 2008, Roberts 1996))--deliberately leaving their professional assessment room to enter the field of business, and thereby reaching out for the other--this socializing does not ultimately lead to a less instrumental type of accountability since the definition of good selection work is the utilitarian degree of client satisfaction. The motive of 'business partners' to contact clients is mainly to greater client satisfaction, and is oriented towards strengthening one's commercial value, especially in economically lean times. Although the 'dollar value of selections' (McCourt, 1999) is demonstrated to a certain extent (clients invest 'only a very little amount of money, maybe a thousand or two of euros for a test, but if you choose the wrong person you actually lose ten thousand' (psychologist 16)), and even though employers deliberately hire the scientific knowledge of personnel selection psychologists to provide accurate and objective predictions of an applicants' future job achievements, the expert in fragment 27 points out that employers do not fully appreciate the inherently technical and--from an outsider's perspective--difficult to understand assessment work (see also McCourt, 1999). Therefore, clients tend to evaluate or value selection services less on the quality of the content, and more on qualities like immediate effect and cost. At the end of the 20th century, positivistic assessments were under-utilized in organizations and hardly accepted by industry, and critics doubted if Industrial Psychology would survive (McCourt 1999, Iles 1999, Herriot & Andersson 1997, Roe 1996). Despite the marginal position of Industrial Psychology in organizations, the 'cottage' industry of test agencies is nevertheless respectable nowadays (Summum, 2014).

HRM in organizations is predominately a managerial practice that is 'an amalgam of description, prescription, and logical deduction' (Storey, 2001:6), and deals with employment management in less academic ways (Watson, 2004)--which creates a disadvantage for the highly specialized test psychologist whose empirical-statistical predictions are unequally valued or applied in business. The most favored methods of test psychologists--intelligence testing and standardized interviewing--are not widely used in HRM-departments or commercial recruitment agencies (McCourt, 1999). In an illustrative study of 1,000 non-psychologist HR workers, it was found that most of these HRM practitioners transferred scholarly research less effectively and had opinions which were in contrast with well-established psychometric research (Rynes, Colbert & Brown, 2002). HR workers consider intelligence to not be a better predictor of performance than personality or values, think that integrity tests effectively predict counter-productive workplace behaviors, use four and not five basic personality

dimensions in the commonly used Meyers Briggs Type Indicator<sup>82</sup>, and consider various personality inventories to be equal in their ability to predict job performance. Even if 'business partners' feel inadequately appreciated by clients, the expert in fragment 27 refuses to 'blame' clients for under-evaluating or downsizing his professional standards because they are just not equipped or skilled enough to value the 'scientific' details involved in professionals' assessments. Conscious of the vulnerable position of scientific Industrial Psychology in the field of business, he offers 'everything' a client requests in order to maintain a good relationship and income.

#### *-Fragment 28*

**Psychologist 9:** *With the police, it's very troublesome to formulate a job profile. It's such a large organization; you've got 49,500 policemen. If you want to change something, it has to go through twenty three channels. Society has changed, it is more complex and international, you need to know more languages. Society has hardened, more immunity against stress is necessary. We want to adjust that in our profile.*

Despite sensible arguments, the expert in fragment 28 seems to not be in a position where he is able to make certain necessary adjustments to selection profiles due to bureaucratic rigidity and possible managerial ignorance. When the royal, 'scientific' way of psychometric personnel selection is not sufficiently understood or appreciated by organizations and employers, the expert is incapable of implementing essential working conditions--which further increases the inequality or lack of mutual respect in the relationship between client and expert. The 'business partner' who strives to be respected for his or her organizational selection can end up in an impasse, developing feelings of impotence which are unlikely for the independent, self-conscious, and professional operating ideal type for the 'selection specialist'. The respondent who reports receiving a not particularly informative letter from the client two days before the assessment takes place with only general data requirements--such as a CV, motivation letter, job description, the 'preferred date,' and 'no additional information on the candidate, no specific questions' (psychologist 7)--and the respondent who settles for less directly involved staff members (like 'an HRM consultant who did not attend [the application process] but talks from a piece of paper' (psychologist 3)) both display the dependency and marginality of selection psychologists in business. Respondents report that it is not always possible either to talk with the client or manager that matters

<sup>82</sup> To describe human personality, the five-factor model (FFM) of Big Five personality traits is commonly used in test psychology (Hoekstra, Ormel & Fruyt, 1996). The five factors are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a questionnaire to classify differences in personalities on the basis of four dimensions: extraversion-introversion, sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, judging-perception, according to the theories of Carl Gustav Jung (The Myers-Briggs Foundation, 2014).

or to take a tour of the organization in order to obtain additional information--while one would expect a stronger involvement on the organization's behalf, since valid selections are in their own interest too. When the effort on both sides is out of balance, 'business partners' experience the paradox of being hired to perform selections based on their objective psychometric knowledge, yet at the same time face a lack of acknowledgement concerning their scientific work. In contrast to job applicants, clients are free to disregard selection advice, and to cooperate with 'charlatans' instead of 'science' if they so desire (McCourt, 1999). Some consider this organizational lack of respect as a crucial test for the adequacy of the paradigm, but the limited influence of personnel selection psychologists on organizational selection practices humbles the disregarded expert (at least).

#### ■ Daily constraints

#### *-Fragment 29*

**Psychologist 3:** *The purchaser has the power.*

The instrumental intention of the 'business partner' to build up a good relationship with clients entails an approach to personnel selection where client satisfaction can become more relevant than acting according to one's own professional standards. When the client's wishes are the psychologist's command, the expert is put into the marginal position of a follower who is hesitant to bite the hand that feeds him or her. The commercial context of Industrial Psychology tempts the ideal type of the 'business partner' into allowing the client, rather than professional standards, to evaluate his or her work; and seduces experts into determining their professional behavior in such a way as to bring in sufficient selection assignments and to maintain their well-rewarded job. The acquired status of the 'business partner' associated with commerce potentially thrives at the expense of the 'business partners' self-respect when experts become less accountable and responsible for their actions than the client who puts them into a dependent position that is similar to job applicants in the selection process. Since the primary reaction of 'business partners' to inappropriate client wishes<sup>83</sup> is primarily instrumental by nature, their neutral mirror-image (as defined by the professional standards taught at university, and as reflected in professional codes of conduct) is at risk of being replaced by the success-driven business standards of clients. The 'business partner' resembles what Roberts (1991:357) calls the narcissistic personality who seems

<sup>83</sup> The psychologist judges whether the question is answerable in this form or if reformulation is necessary. It is also judged whether there are any (professional-) ethical obstacles in answering the question (NIP, 2010).



'captured and transfixed by the image of self that others offer, so that their attitudes and expectations wholly define the possibilities of self'.

Due to factors such as cuts in the number of managerial jobs, the accessibility of tests for other HR-workers, and general unfavorable economic circumstances--these in combination with a lack of appreciation for expensive 'scientific' assessments--employers are less prepared to pay the full price for extended selection, resulting in experts offering less valid digital testing with generated reports for 'organizations who don't want to spend 1400 euro on an extended development assessment' (psychologist 3). Used to meet employer's needs and to ensure the place of being partner in the selection business, digital selections for which the client has to pay less are actually 'a means of saving, because it's of course difficult now' (psychologist 3). Although digital testing is cost-saving for clients and is a great financial help for selection agencies, it is rather 'lengthy' for the candidate who has to use 'sometimes, two, three, four separate links' to connect to different tests (psychologist 12). The digitalization of tests and selection reports introduces a new element that Sennett (2008:109) defines as 'the relationship of quantity with quality' in which hands-off technology is inclined towards becoming a reality in itself, and disables what Sennett calls the 'relational understanding' and 'human mental understanding' of the expert--for whom it is made less possible 'to think and act at the same time'. When experts allow the computer to do the learning, they are in the eyes of Sennett (2008: 38-44) 'serving as a passive witness ... not participating'. Shortened selection assessments involve less human services (essentially, face-to-face contact between an expert and a candidate), and take a limited predictive validity for granted (Schmidt & Hunter 1998, Ryan et.al. 1999). When unsupervised digital tests are done by candidates at home or in a computer room, the expert is deprived of opportunities to observe the performance of candidates, and of being able to decide to add extra instruments during the assessment process<sup>84</sup>. For firms who are not willing to pay the full price for extended selection assessments with expensive selection reports written by the experts themselves, agencies offer digitalized assessments where 'you have to sit for three hours behind your computer' and get automatically generated reports which are 'very beautiful, with all kinds of colors and up to even four or five pages, plus graphics of the test' (psychologist 3). In their pursuit of client satisfaction, 'business partners' are prepared to sacrifice and drop professional standards; and yet, although 'selection specialists' consider digitalized reports to be less valid and 'genuine,' and hesitate to place the responsibility of selection outside of the hands of the expert, 'business partners' look upon them as the ultimate representations of the objective psychometric paradigm which applies to the client's wishes for clear quantitative test results. Digitalized reports, as an answer to the commercial needs of clients,

<sup>84</sup> When the head and the hand are separate, it is the head that suffers (Sennett, 2008:44).

imply a strong belief in the objectivity and validity of assessment data in the allocations of job applicants.

#### *-Fragment 30*

**Psychologist 1:** *Personnel selection is about not getting people in your organization who cause problems. And where are these people? There are indeed those people with problems, who are vulnerable and unstable. Furthermore, an organization involves cooperation, you must be able to cooperate, you must give and take. If you get a certain task and you act fast on that, you are a fast learner. When you don't reach that level, and it takes longer for you to understand it, and less interesting work is being arranged for you; this is a risk factor for the organization. You have this base, there're maybe ten ways to deal with say 'John'. If you're too dumb, then it won't work out with 'John' because you will probably make bad decisions. When you're too neurotic, you will be overly concerned and go under. And if you're not extraverted, then you let 'John' ramble; so it'll not work anyway.*

This fragment shows that the pursuit of 'business partners' for client satisfaction can conflict with the interests of job applicants who deviate in certain perspectives from the 'ideal employee', and are therefore rejected for the job in order for the 'business partner' to avoid running the risk of recommending inappropriate candidates who could pose potential problems for the organization to clients. From the perspective of the expert in fragment 30, the 'ideal' job candidate is sufficiently intelligent, emotionally stable, and extraverted enough to successfully carry out a managerial job which makes selection psychology 'as simple as that, the rest is frills' (psychologist 1). In ambiguous selection decisions, the 'business partner' is inclined to not give less suitable applicants the benefit of the doubt in order to avoid possible false positive selection advice, since 'clients want sure, hard advice. If you have any doubts, than he isn't suitable. If I find something unusual, then we I say: just don't do it' (psychologist 8); 'otherwise, I take the risk that an organization will return in six months to ask how I could have advised this one' (psychologist 5). The rejection of potential risk full job applicants reinforces a normalization process in organizations which comes at the expense of those applicants who do not seem to meet all requirements--like the respondent who prefers that candidates for managerial jobs do not sit with 'fools' [i.e. people with national assistance benefits] in the waiting room,' whom he considers to 'radiate unprofessionalism' (psychologist 4). The tendency of the 'business partner' to avoid false positive advice in order to keep the client content blocks candidates' access for opportunities to learn on the job and to potentially develop their competencies. The attitude of the 'business partner' towards personnel selection, defined by the client's interests, seems to legitimate the unequal access of applicants to resources by applying the authority of clear, hard figures within the technocratic paradigm of personnel selection psychology.

Respondents report four possible outcomes of personnel selection: namely, a clear cut positive selection recommendation for a candidate's suitability for a certain job, a positive recommendation with the provision that a candidate's potential will be released by providing certain conditions for him or her, a clear cut negative recommendation implying that the candidate is inadequately equipped for the job, or a summary of the most important positive and negative assessment results without a final recommendation. This study shows that the ideal type the 'business partner' is prepared to deliver any one of these particular types of selection advice in order to prevent client dissatisfaction; and in doing so, actively embeds the quantitative data of 'hard' psychometric science into the 'soft' sciences of establishing relationships and customer relations marketing. Clients generally prefer a clear judgment about the suitability of job applicants without 'nuances' (psychologist 2), and assign this responsibility to personnel selection psychologists; however, the 'business partner' wants to avoid the risk of providing a wrong selection recommendation which could have potentially troubling effects on keeping business with clients. In their attempt to avoid false positive selection advice and to please the client, 'business partners' who are not totally sure about a candidate's suitability strategically exclaim that ascertained potentiality will unfold only when certain conditions and specific means for development are supplied by the organization--advice which is also 'meant for the coach; the coach loves it, because he definitely wants to have work' (psychologist 1), as is seen in statements like 'independent leadership must be coached further in order to fully develop as a manager' (psychologist 2). By offering such conditional advice, the 'business partner' avoids unwanted selection recommendations and actually boomerangs the responsibility back to the clients, who must then decide if they can create the adequate circumstances and conditions to develop a candidate's potential within a limited period of time. If they accept the expert's conditional advice, it is up to the clients to estimate if the candidate's competencies are sufficiently grown after a certain time frame. If things turn out differently then, experts can find plenty of causes within the organization, or in the candidate himself, so that they stay out of trouble. Conditional selection advice (which includes the essential means and learning conditions for which the client must provide for the further development of a candidate's potential) is a way of protecting the expert from mistakes and creates an opportunity for the client to react by saying that 'we really can't organize this' (psychologist 7)--thereby enabling the client to make the final decision about acceptance or rejection in such a way that neither expert nor client has to take the burdensome responsibility for rejecting a candidate in the end. By relieving clients of the responsibility of harming a rejected internal applicant, the expert offers help to those employers who are unwilling to give bad news but also want to prevent hampered relationships within their organization. When the selection advice of 'business partners' is purely in the interest of the client, experts run the risk of not being morally accountable in their partial decision making. The pursuit of client satis-

faction through the selection of the most stable, intelligent, and sociable employees can be described as a form of instrumental or utilitarian accountability--where science is primarily used to affirm the clients who want the best employees, but seem to fear taking responsibility for the selection decisions themselves.

#### *-Fragment 31*

**Interviewer:** *Does it also happen that the client [like the candidates] doesn't agree with the advice?*

**Psychologist 9:** *Yes ... that happens once in a while; than he can always ask for a second opinion. The client is of course the customer, so when he doesn't agree, we call him and ask what did you expect? What is the problem?*

**Interviewer:** *Yes, exactly, and how often does it happen that the client disagrees with the advice?*

**Psychologist 9:** *No, I can't remember. Actually almost never, erm, maybe twice or three time in the past five years that I can recall.*

The question of whether clients (who are regarded by 'business partners' as the righteous customers in personnel selection, and not the candidates) happen to disagree with provided selection advice seems to take the expert in fragment 31 somewhat by surprise--as though this situation barely occurs; and as a result, he has not given it much thought. His suggestion of offering a second opinion as a possible solution seems to be a plausible response but is actually in contrast with the expert's trust and belief in the original assessment results--whereupon his account starts to get inconsistent and contrary to analyzing the client's expectations and the reasons why the selection advice forms a 'problem'. However, before the expert in fragment 31 seems to get into real trouble, he ends the discussion with the statement that dissatisfied clients are rare and 'almost never' happen as far as he can recall. Since mistakes are unavoidable in the social sciences where professionals deal with a certain range of faults in their psychological measurements (Drenth & Sijtsma, 2006), the frequency of 'almost never' seems not very realistic and could rather reveal shame, defence, or a successful attunement to the client's interests before things get out of hand. In contrast to critical candidates, respondents report undertaking great efforts to find an explanation for client disagreements--so that 'with a candidate it sometimes happens that you just don't reach an agreement, but it often does with the client' (psychologist 8). This difference in treatment reflects the 'business partner's concern of actively aiming at client preferences. The attitude of the 'business partner' towards the job applicant is mainly led by a service mentality towards the client; so that when candidates doubt or disagree with assessment data, the client's interests prevail and the 'business partners' carefully focus their energy on client satisfaction by inquiring about and explaining questions that may arise--informing clients about assessment results such as 'intelligence' scores with

which candidates disagree because 'they actually have a higher educational background.' However, since the clients 'expect information on this as well' (psychologist 5), the candidate is left unheard. Unsatisfied clients have to be handled carefully; and in the underlying perspective of the 'business partner' (which could be described as 'management myopia' (Brief & Bazerman, 2003)), the interests of the original object of psychology, in this case the job applicant, are more or less ignored. When psychology is applied to the assessee in the self-interest of the client and disregards extenuating circumstances--such as coming to terms with the past, or overcoming a trauma which obstructs growth and the full-functioning of the candidate--the 'business partner' has ethical difficulties incorporating the interests of individual job applicants into the selection process, which has a confusing effect on the professional identity of psychologists. The 'business partner' maintains a different relationship with clients than with candidates who are judged less, and seems more concerned with avoiding detrimentally false positive advice for clients than false negative advice that can harm candidates.

#### *-Fragment 32*

**Psychologist 6:** *I'd given a guy a positive recommendation. Later I hear from the client that they hadn't hired him, because he did rather strange things during the negotiations. They asked me if you could have seen this in the assessments, but it is very difficult to assess that afterwards. Then I thought; was I maybe too positive in my judgment of him? You never know.*

Primarily triggered by liaisons with organizations, 'business partners' allow for the interests of the client to not only prevail over those of the job candidate, but also over their own professional interests. Fragment 32 shows that because of their strong belief in psychometric technology (for which they are hired in the first place) only self-criticism remains when 'business partners' are confronted with a complaining client who despite the effort of enlightening explanations continues to disagree with the selection recommendation. When disagreements cannot be prevented or solved, experts do not lose their belief in the assessment data but are prepared to alter their subjective interpretation of it, so that 'afterwards we also [like the client] think he [the candidate] shouldn't be labeled as suitable' (psychologist 7). When the disagreeing client perseveres in criticizing a provided selection recommendation, the only solution for 'business partners' is to doubt their contributions to the selection outcome and to take responsibility for their own mistakes. Obviously, this form of accountability asks a great deal from the expert and can be so unpleasant that it undesirably prevents learning--as is illustrated by the phrase 'you never know' in fragment 32. By taking full responsibility when clients doubt their selection advice, 'business partners' leave the credibility of assessment instruments untouched, since the cause for unwanted selection advice stems from the personal faults of the individual expert in a typical situation.

The authority of 'business partners' as knowledge-workers is somewhat restored by their recognition of undesirable subjectivity in the selection process, which is regarded as a base of random mistakes within Industrial Psychology's positivistic psychometric paradigm. When called upon by clients, 'business partners' offer shorter, cheaper and less valid digital selection assessments (without face-to-face contact with the candidate), are prepared to formulate conditional selection advice so that the client is able to reject it, and comply with clients who protest against unwanted and unexpected advice by changing their opinion and searching for personal mistakes in the collection or interpretation of data. The motive of 'business partners' to choose a career in synoptic selection psychology and to stay out of complex mental health issues seems in the practice of test psychology to turn into a confusing compliance with the power of organizations.

#### *-Fragment 33*

**Psychologist 3:** *The Myers-Briggs has a very bad reputation in test psychology. Although for a practicing psychologist it's very useable. Well, I use it in a supportive way, when it offers a very outspoken picture.*

'Business partners' flexibility in meeting clients' wishes ideally remains within the limits of the psychometric paradigm since this is the service the client both wants and pays for. However, when the employer (who has less psychometric knowledge than persuasive power) demands the measurement of special competencies or the use of popular instruments--like the, at the time of the research, non-'approved' questionnaire Myers-Briggs Type Indicator in fragment 33--the expert is prepared to exceed his professional limits. Popular instruments can be commercial look-alikes of the 'real,' valid, and reliable psychological tests as published by recommended test publishers; however, because of their convincing face validity, it is hard for clients to both detect flaws in their appearance, and to distinguish between test psychologists and what Sennett calls 'semi- or unskilled' (2008:106) selection workers among their users. Popular tests benefit from the psychometric associations with the robot metaphor (when in fact they are actually a 'non-scientific' simulation). The same is true for approved personality questionnaires, which are disputed in personnel selection because of their vulnerability to impression management and their inadequacy to fulfill the scientific requirements of valid personnel selection (NIP, 2012)--but which are still used by test psychologists in order to be able to collect all of the necessary data for the selection decision. Whether deserved or undeserved, the robotic perfection of assessment instruments is persuasive in selling psychological assessments to organizations since they create the impression that they cannot fail. By deliberately using invalid psychological assessment instruments, as is seen with the expert in fragment 33, the expert separates science from technology while still presenting the technique as sci-

ence to the client and job applicant in order to meet what they want and expect. Since experts like to use the 'factual knowledge within a system of dominance' (Roberts, 1991:361) that results from poor instruments because of its appearance of accuracy and scientificity, valid assessment data becomes less prominent in the decision-making process.

#### ■ Review

While ideal type 'selection specialists' try to minimize the expert's influence on the assessment results in order to guarantee equal opportunities for all job candidates and to safeguard objectivity, the ideal type the 'business partner' intervenes in the selection process with less hesitation in order to better adjust it to the wishes of the clients who are in charge and compensate them. In their professional actions, 'business partners' include the client as a central source for focusing, checking, and accounting; and they define work success in terms of client satisfaction. 'Business partners' have the aspiration to both be accepted by the organization management as a provisional, respected external staff member of the HRM department, and to transcend the marginal societal position of the economically less appreciated fields of health workers, or the solitude of the quality-driven 'selection specialist' in the assessment room. Out of loyalty to the client, 'business partners' make great efforts to avoid unwanted or false positive selection advice, which means that their relationship with candidates is less engaged since they consider so called false negative advice or incorrect rejections of potentially suitable candidates as being taken for granted. This ideal type focuses one-dimensionally on the relevance of right selection judgments for organizations and claims to perform fair job allocations by offering free access to personnel selection for all those in need of a job--although 'business partners' do not hide the fact that they prefer to associate with intelligent, stable and extraverted applicants for managerial jobs at higher levels in the organizational hierarchy for which assessments seem to be a part of their secondary conditions of employment. The 'business partner' is less interested in and hardly acts in the service of those selection candidates whose interests are different than those of clients.

#### *Professionalism*

The pursuit of commerce is adverse to the professionalism of 'business partners': it allows experts to make compromises at the expense of standardization and objectivity in the selection process psychometric paradigm, and to use science in an opportunistic way in order to please the client. If necessary for daily practice, the ideal type the 'business partner' applies less valid instruments in order to measure specific competencies for which clients ask (or simply because a business prefers certain popular instruments), digitalizes the selection assessment in order to avoid expensive instruments that need

face-to-face contact, or adjusts his or her selection advice. By providing a conditional selection recommendation that involves additional training facilities to unfold the potential of job applicants, the expert is able to leave the responsibility of deciding about the final admission to the employer and provides a way of reducing unwanted recommendations of wrong candidates. 'Business partners' show little constraints or scruples in their professional behavior when they absorb their clients' interests into their actions, degrade science in the service of commerce, and settle for an adjustment of their professional standards according to the whims of the market by offering clients every choice of selection assessments in order to sustain their mutual relationship. In order to persevere in a tough market, the 'business partner' applies constraints to his or her professional principles--which the employer is not always aware of or is unable to fully appreciate--thereby unintentionally adding to the marginalization of the little understood 'scientific' selection psychologist in business. The general held view that competition in, in this case, the Dutch personnel selection market of academically trained psychologists, commercial recruitment, and selection agencies and human resource (HR)-departments of firms, leads to better work and quality is challenged by Sennett (2008:37), who argues that commerce ignores the 'ethos of doing good work' and makes experts feel misunderstood, depressed, and unsatisfied. The service-oriented attitude of the 'business partner' facilitates a dependent and docile attitude for the professional, making the content of his or her job professionally less stimulating, and asking less of his or her knowledge and competencies<sup>85</sup>. Although the powerful psychometric principles of Industrial Psychology offer the 'business partner' a valued access to industry, they paradoxically cease to be present in personnel selection advice when the clients' demands run counter to them. It is not that 'business partners' do not value the psychometric paradigm; rather, they embrace it just like the ideal type the 'selection specialist' does, but are seduced by material and immaterial incentives and tend to make professional sacrifices in order to avoid complex conflicts.

#### *Reflexivity*

In their pursuit of analyzing a client's wishes, commercial 'business partners' cynically violate their principles of professionalism and do not seem to take science seriously enough. Although one would expect experts who deliberately make concessions to the paradigm to suffer from the effects of this lack of constraints, respondents generally do not report unsettling doubt, tension, or remorse about their compromised professional identity or the quality of their work. In their radical choices, 'business partners' seem to

<sup>85</sup> One will see less problem finding in competition, because 'within the framework of competition ... clear standards of achievement and closure are needed to measure performance and to dole out rewards,' and less information will be exchanged between the experts (Sennett, 2008:33).

display a lack of critical awareness of the knowledge, power issues, and ethics of job allocation in their relationships with clients and candidates. Deviations from the recommended technology can bear positive effects; and the warm relationships that provide economic benefits and a better recognition as a confidante of the industry can calm professional scruples. However, their docile attitude towards clients becomes less deserved when respected clients are unable or unwilling to reciprocally appreciate the expert's psychometric efforts and professional compromises--which seems to trouble the 'business partner' more than making professional compromises, and leaves the expert in a state of dissatisfaction, uncertainly, or at an impasse.

### ***Paradox***

The reason for the paradox of professionalism that 'business partners' are in does not derive from some profound disbelief in the paradigm but comes as the result of the 'business partners' will to be accepted by business in a harsh commercial selection market. As is revealed in the practices of ideal type for the 'business partner,' the compromises of personnel selection psychologists may be unavoidable in order to make a living, but can subvert the professional identity and psycho-ethics of the expert. An important impact of the market value forming a central part of the 'business partners' professional identity on the individual expert is a distortion of the general image of being a neutral mirror in the process of objective data finding--a result of compromising too much on professional standards in reaction to clients' needs. The lack of constraints makes the expert less responsible and visible in the selection process, and can degrade the 'business partner' into a 'servant of business,'<sup>86</sup> ending up powerless like a tiny cog in a giant machine and imposed upon to apply the disciplinary power of Industrial Psychology to make accurate selection decisions without the opportunity of meeting all of the accompanying professional principles. The loss of independent status and pride--since scientific professionalism implies owing responsibility to knowledge--further reinforces the practice of selection testing as a pseudo-science. While test psychologists tend to penalize assessees if their account is inconsistent, the ideal type the 'business partner' instead tries to please his or her employer (which he or she is not actually supposed to do). The paradox of professionalism that the 'business partner' is in therefore seems to be more serious than that of the ideal type of the 'selection specialist,' as the pursuit of quality as a central motive for the craftsman is lost out of sight. The pressure of competition and commerce in a money and ratio-driven society can reduce the test psychologist to simply being a 'servant' who offers a pseudo-science of testing. The far-reaching influence of commerce--visible without constraints, modesty,

or integrity; and able to unprofessionally determine what can and cannot be done in the implementation of the paradigm--labels the 'business partner' as being one of the least professional ideal types presented in this study.

<sup>86</sup> 'Blind competitiveness' is dominated by utility thinking and setting the rules beforehand, which reduces the expert to being a 'bored servant instead of a curious creator' (Sennett 2008:267, Huizinga 1934).

## 2.5 Career counselor

*Motivation matters more than talent (Sennett, 2008:11).*

Just as psychometric analysis and reasoning reward the ideal type the 'selection specialist,' and just like structural contact with organizations drives the 'business partner', 'career counselors' are the ideal types to be motivated by the sincere desire to help relationships with candidates. Although the ideal type 'career counselors' works in the field of personnel selection, they actually aspire to a career in mental health which requires long and expensive post-masters clinical training for which only a limited number of psychologists are allowed or financially able to enter. Some of the rejected psychologists end up in fields like personnel selection psychology, in which you are much less able to help someone mentally but at least can earn a living. In spite of their daily efforts to regulate the job allocations of others, 'career counselors' show less control over their own careers ('I think (sighs) happens "accidentally" with very many jobs' (psychologist 14)) due to a labor market with periods of economic recession and an overabundance of graduates in psychology (Deheu, 1995). The assumption that personnel selection agencies are mainly staffed by organizational psychologists (McCourt, 1999) like the 'selection specialist' and 'business partner' who both intentionally choose a career in personnel selection, is contradicted by respondents who state that 'most psychologists want to be an aid worker and not a selection psychologist' (psychologist 9), and that 'I'm the only real assessment psychologist here, because most psychologists are clinically trained' (psychologist 4). The ideal type the 'career counselor' is clinically trained and end up in personnel selection with a helping attitude, and with the wish to relate to others remaining in the background. Of the ideal types presented in this study, the helping 'career counselor' is mostly oriented towards the interests and motivations of the individual candidate--whose needs are regarded as more important than the clients if necessary. However, the 'career counselor' sadly lands in a field where the interests of individual candidates, the main focus of clinical psychologists, seem to be mainly overlooked in the daily practice of selections.

### ■ Pursuit of applicant's interest

*-Fragment 34*

**Psychologist 15:** *I perform a combination of assessment and coaching. For me, that's an attractive combination.*

'Career counselors' prefer an appealing (at least for them) mix of selection and coaching, and at least partly wish to turn the personnel selection process from an exclusively selecting one into a helping one. This turnabout would allow experts to both analyze candidates for the desired jobs and to come in 'real' contact with candidates--whom they can ask questions which are normally asked 'only after having been friends for a

very long time (laughs)', but which make the job worthwhile and 'very agreeable' (psychologist 13). While personnel selection for the 'business partner' and the 'selection specialist' comes down to vacant jobs on the one hand and individuals who are available to do the job on the other (McCourt, 1999), the 'career counselor' turns this order around and primarily focuses on the individual in search of a career. Their urge to actively help or coach candidates reflects a wish to transcend the rational image of the selection psychologist who is supposed to observe, listen and analyze; but not to intervene. In order to transcend the instrumental orientation of selection assessments by making it into a face-to-face understanding between candidate and expert, the 'career counselor' would rather prefer to coach applicants for a longer period of time to 'keep a finger on the pulse' and to be able to tell them to 'pay attention to this, or to really make use of this quality' (psychologist 13). For 'career counselors', career choice advice is more 'fun ... to get along more with the candidate', and 'less troublesome when you help someone further after hearing poignant things' (professional 10). Performing personnel selection can be a rather solitary activity for experts who spend their days working alone in their offices; on the other hand, the 'career counselor' derives satisfaction and 'the most fulfillment' (psychologist 16) from observing candidates grow.

*-Fragment 35*

**Psychologist 13:** *I gave a negative recommendation. Luckily, this person recognized himself in the development points. That makes a difference, because then I think; 'I've probably seen it right'.*

Since 'most people know themselves pretty well' (psychologist 2), test psychologists generally ask for the opinion and reaction of candidates to the assessment results at the end of the day when the assessment is reviewed. For 'career counselors', the quality of the selection assessment is determined by the extent to which candidates recognize themselves in the assessment results and give their approval as the expert in fragment 35 stresses, thereby indicating that the expert is 'probably right' and does not have to face the responsibility of a false negative recommendation. The candidate's consent is of great importance to 'career counselors,' because when candidates are dissatisfied that 'I gave the wrong advice, surely that must be the case' (professional 10)--which is a not frequently heard perspective amongst the respondents in this study who show less attention or have less accepting attitudes towards disagreeing candidates (see Chapter 2.1). The assumption of 'career counselors' that the opinion of candidates is valuable (as they are considered to be able to recognize the accuracy of a given selection recommendation themselves,<sup>87</sup> and to possess a realistic self-image which is not influenced

<sup>87</sup> Psychologist 2: Most people know themselves pretty well. In a minute you're going to take a large number of psychological tests, but you probably also can tell yourself who you are.

by impression management) may look naïve to the 'selection specialist' and 'business partner'.

*-Fragment 36*

**Professional 10 (royal marine):** *In order to assess someone's stability, you have to dig deep for all sorts of far-reaching events they have experienced. Sometimes, I'm the first to whom they have told them to. You have to be tough with that, because the worst thing you can do is to admit these people. Then they'll become just more unhappy.*

The rule or code of acting in accordance with the societal rule that personnel selection ought to be a rational and objective process which is not determined by personal preferences or prejudices is 'tough' for the ideal type the 'career counselor'. To be able to hold on to the principle of 'objective' job-candidate matching, the expert in fragment 35 has no other choice than to rationalize her act of assigning a negative (and for the candidate probably upsetting) selection recommendation by stressing that people will not become 'happy' if they have to work in a mismatch. Her well-intended attempt to protect applicants from the disappointment of a poor fit gives her the peace of mind to formulate a negative recommendation for the applicant, who is obviously less inclined to agree with that decision but in a far less powerful position to challenge or change it. 'Career counselors' rejection of candidates seems legitimate as it is objectively and fairly determined within the psychometric paradigm and prevents the candidate from future unpleasant experiences. The claim of the expert in fragment 36 to operate in the interests of candidates could also conceal a reluctance for making negative selection decisions.

■ **Helping in practice**

*-Fragment 37*

**Interviewer:** *Could you name another dilemma?*

**Psychologist 9:** *You have an ethical dilemma, erm, when someone is perhaps not that suitable for the job, but you like him very much for example, and you have had a pleasant conversation. Especially someone who's gone through very difficult times and you know this can be bad for the job. And, yes, psychologists are human too, then you start granting someone something even though he's not suitable.*

Fragment 37 is meaningful for how the ideal type the 'career counselor', who is trained to empathize with individuals who seek help and is less trained in the psychometric paradigm, operates in the dominant personnel selection paradigm with an objective, detached professional approach. 'Career counselors' are much more aware of the conse-

quences of negative selection advice for the life of job applicants, which is 'the biggest dilemma for me ... because when I give a negative recommendation, than it means that almost nine out of ten times the guy will not get that job' (psychologist 6), which puts a 'psychologically stressful' (psychologist 15) burden on their shoulders. They want to show their sympathy for the applicant (for whom a negative selection decision can be a verdict), feel responsible for others' careers, and employ the assessment-acquired extended knowledge to help the candidate (as it is a pity to waste these insights).

*-Fragment 38*

**Psychologist 1:** *We try to form an informal sphere. When the sphere is informal, people also become informal. They say things about which they think afterwards 'I should have said that differently'. There was this man who wanted a day job for his singing career. You have to wonder how important it really is; is the man able to function well, or is he gone at the first opportunity where he can earn money with his singing? You must consider this and raise the matter in the report as well.*

Personnel selection is about choosing the best candidate; and to reach this goal, the personnel selection psychologist has to show professional power over the job candidate (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Communication is not yet open since the set competence profile determines what information is called for and candidates, who are forced to define themselves in the selection process in terms of the assessed competencies on whose mastery the desired job depends, may feel uncertain and dependent on the expert (Costas, 2012). The expert in fragment 38 creates an environment of informality and friendship in order to be more likely to collect essential data for job allocations but seems to overlook what Islam and Zyphur (2006) call the 'inequalities in bargaining power' in personnel selection. The asymmetrical relationship between expert and candidate in personnel selection-- where Roberts (1991:361) argues that 'the subordinate [candidate] accounts for himself to the superior [expert] rather than reciprocally'- seems to be rather a limitation on the openness of the candidate in the interaction. The ideal type the 'career counselor' acts as a friendly interrogator in order to create an agreeable atmosphere and to tempt candidates to reveal unfavorable facts--in order to be able to paint the 'right' picture, one that is not colored by impression management, for the client. Powerful professionals, who deliberately use an empathic attitude as an instrument for data collection in their attempt to increase the validity of their selection advice, can intentionally mislead the candidate. In the unequal relationship between professional and job candidate, their empathic attitude can easily become an instrument for persuading applicants to talk freely without applying impression management, in order to make a verdict and determine suitability. This exerted power leads to a delicate, balancing communication process between expert and candidate in which the latter has little freedom to not answer, or inflicting in candidates a certain ambig-

ity or inauthenticity in their responses to personal or impertinent questions which would actually fit a more therapeutic setting.

Paradoxically, a climate of friendliness and helpfulness can reduce individuality and diversity into identity regulation and homogeneity, which is illustrated by candidates who evoke 'irritation' of experts (like the candidate who 'was totally not sensitive but I am (psychologist 13)'; 'sometimes you've got an assessment with people who show that they're very superficial, and you yourself get annoyed with a person' (psychologist 9); or in regards to an applicant for a bank job who 'played a vague answer game, they didn't show a lot of themselves' (psychologist 1)). The approachable attitude of the 'career counselor' in the selection process can have unwanted effects when expert and applicant are not on the same wavelength. From the perspective of Sennett (2008:93), empathy should be about 'imagining oneself as another, in all of his or her differences, rather than simply likening him or her to ourselves' or to the job profile. It seems unrealistic that 'career counselors' assume that job candidates will speak freely without distortion or inhibition, and that every selection candidate will get along with or open up to the helpful attitude of the 'career counselor'. Candidates who are not talkative can be suspected of sabotaging the 'career counselors' need for additional information in order for them to help, which can create feelings of annoyance in the expert and possible adverse effects on the process of recommendation. The attempt to help candidates is highly valued by the 'career counselor' but is difficult to structurally imbed in personnel selection--as it seems an illusion that the empathic helpful attitude of 'career counselors' is free from knowledge-power influences.

#### *-Fragment 38*

**Interviewer:** *Erm, are there dilemmas you encounter during your work also?*

**Psychologist 13:** *Erm, well for me it's a dilemma, erm, because I'm also interested in someone's life outside, erm, working life actually, so for me it is sometimes a dilemma how far I can question certain topics. Because then I think, okay is this information still useful to assesses someone's suitability? Is it still correct, does the candidate still feel at ease? However, I do think, yes, this is an important theme in someone's life, like not feeling optimal in your surroundings or taking unpleasant experiences to your next employer. You know, so one has to deal with it. But then I somewhat enter the area of health care. That's a somewhat therapeutic conversation, so I think the dilemma is how deep you should go.*

**Interviewer:** *And how often do you experience this?*

**Psychologist 13:** *(Sighs) well not that often, and it's also dependent on my own mood; when I'm just very sharp and sense something in the candidate, and, erm, yes, tension. No, well, say one out of seven times.*

Creating intimate, friendly, and informal relationships with 'all sorts of people' makes 'career counselors' feel like they are 'in the center of life' (psychologist 14), which is a rewarding aspect of the job for them. By bringing up personal issues which are usually more often addressed in the field of mental health, the expert in fragment 38 corresponds to a need that 'career counselors' have for realness in the supposedly detached world of objective selection psychology. Such personal exchanges are even considered more 'real' and 'truthful' than the ones in everyday selection life (psychologist 14). Fragment 38 shows that the expert has only the best intentions in trying to access additional information which lays outside of the range of the direct assessment of job suitability; however, this data collection also illustrates that the decision to 'question certain topics' depends on the mood and intuition of the expert. Since the power relationship between the expert and the candidate is in favor of the professional, the helpful attitude of the 'career counselor' can easily turn moralistic, as is seen with the expert who is satisfied when 'I can really give someone something, when I've opened up someone's eyes to things he can be proud of and act on in the future; this is really a striking characteristic you know, you yourself may not see it that clearly' (psychologist 13). A respondent who trains colleagues in writing selection reports urges them to write 'for everyone without explaining too much' in order to avoid harming candidates by writing sentences like 'candidate says he doesn't give a rip or couldn't care less for the organization in which he works' since this can be misinterpreted by the employer (psychologist 7). This two-folded mind of the 'career counselor'--to adjust candidates to a job and to authoritatively give a clear verdict and decide what is best for the candidate--is a characteristic feature of the ideal type the 'career counselor'.

#### *-Fragment 39*

**Interviewer:** *Are there any pitfalls for you?*

**Psychologist 13:** *I, erm, want to see the positive sides of people very much.*

**Interviewer:** *Okay.*

**Psychologist 13:** *So that I'm maybe just more inclined than others to give a positive recommendation, because I think, yes, that person can also do it in this way.*

**Interviewer:** *Okay.*

**Psychologist 13:** *While I myself am also positive and want to give people a chance. That's maybe a pitfall. Because of this, I'm not critical enough.*

**Interviewer:** *Okay.*

**Psychologist 13:** *Yes.*

**Interviewer:** *Does this happen often?*

**Psychologist 13:** *Erm, no. Look, I only give a positive recommendation if I really stand behind it, and it's difficult to compare because I don't know if someone else maybe would not have given a positive recommendation, erm, but I'm inclined to search for someone's strengths, yes.*



The expert in fragment 39 emphasizes that her tendency towards positive thinking when analyzing candidates only occurs when she is 'really' certain of it, even if empirical evidence for her good intentions is lacking. Her self-confidence and sense of acting right is not confirmed by facts--just like the respondent who says 'I seldom experienced doubt, and rarely gave false-positive advice; that's why I trust my own giving-the-benefit-of-the-doubt feeling' (psychologist 5)--since the validity of these open recommendations is not actively checked on. When confronted with a selection candidate who appears highly motivated and in need of a job, the primary reaction of clinically trained 'career counselors' is to grant him or her this chance, even if the motivated candidate is not fully suitable for the job. To account for their open and therefore mild selection advice, 'career counselors' focus more on motivation than ability, rely on the candidate's drive to develop ability later on in the new job, or assume like Sennett (2008:291) does that abilities are democratically and 'widely diffused among human beings, rather than restricted to an elite'<sup>88</sup>In search of the best candidate, the ideal types 'selection specialists' and 'business partners' sort applicants by their gradient of ability--since these selection experts are asked by clients to search for extreme scores (which represent the most successful workers), of which there are actually only a few. These experts would rather prefer to use a four-point observation rating scale in simulations and role-plays instead of one with five points in an attempt to avoid mediocre results and get indications of superiority or inferiority. On the contrary, 'career counselors' tend to give a candidate--who usually is already preselected by the organization for final advice, and who partially scores in the large middle-group<sup>89</sup>--a chance and to not reject him or her for this. In comparison to the previous two ideal types, the 'career counselor' seems to emphasize to a lesser extent the differences in ability between people while assuming more that abilities are sufficiently shared in common by the large majority of human beings,<sup>90</sup> which implies that motivation indeed matters more than talent. In addition, 'it is funny' (psychologist 16), but 'scientific' personnel selection assessments are less exclusive than most people think, and are mainly about middle management instead of high-level jobs.

<sup>88</sup> Equating the median with the mediocre legitimates neglect. The capacity to work well is fairly shared among human beings and learning to do good work would make human beings more capable of self-governance. That's why motivation is a more important issue than talent in consummating craftsmanship (Sennett, 2008:285).

<sup>89</sup> Test scores follow the curve of a normal distribution, representing an inverted champagne flute, in which more than 50% of human beings score in the middle--only one standard deviation from the midpoint. This means that most people share the same ability (Flohr, 2007). The claims of work that is neither amateur nor virtuoso: this middle ground of work is craftsmanship (Sennett, 2008:117).

<sup>90</sup> 'We share in common and in roughly equal measure the raw abilities that allow us to become good craftsmen' (Sennett, 2008:241).

The reason why the 'career counselor' gives priority to the interests of job applicants is not always purely motivated by feelings of empathy<sup>91</sup> but can also be a wish to avoid taking full responsibility for negative selection decisions. The tendency of 'career counselors' to give candidates the benefit of the doubt provides job candidates with an opportunity to, once admitted to the desired job, extend their skills by learning on the job, while a negative recommendation closes all doors. Since decisions in personnel selection are hard to avoid for 'career counselors', the formulation of an open recommendation is less favorable for candidates than a decisive positive recommendation but at least offers them an entrance to the organization and an opportunity to further develop their abilities (given the right circumstances; 'otherwise it's too big of a risk' (psychologist 13)). While a positive recommendation is the best and most secure option for candidates, a conditional positive recommendation seems second-best because it postpones the ultimate employment decision and offers candidates additional opportunities to prove themselves more than a time-limited selection assessment does. In addition, an open recommendation relieves the expert from taking responsibility for a negative decision or possible false positive advice. When 'career counselors' refuse to be the bearer of bad news to selection candidates ('I give someone a resignation, look that's not what I'm for') and are reluctant to decide on the future of others, the responsibility of assessing an employee's unsuitability is sent back to the employer, who must conduct 'good appraisals' during the work situation (psychologist 8). Applicants should hear negative career messages directly from the employer, who needs 'to conduct good performance interviews because at an assessment it could become clear that someone is just not suitable for a job ... I can reconcile with that, when a candidate just isn't at the right place and isn't himself too happy about it. That's why it's also very important that a firm is not too friendly with its employers' (psychologist 8). 'Career counselors' prefer to bypass the issue of social and professional power and seem just as reluctant as the employer to accept responsibility for rejection. This behavior would be described by 'selection specialists' and 'business partners' as undermining the essence of their profession since taking responsibility for positive and negative selection advice is part of the package, even in situations where clients want to keep their hands clean. The 'career counselor's' combination of being aware that negative selection advice has a large impact on candidates and being reluctant or hesitant to take responsibility for withholding a job from someone, seem to make assessments by personnel selection psychologists redundant as they regard it as the task of the organization itself. The attempt of 'career counselors' to redefine the authoritarian ways of classic diagnostics

<sup>91</sup> Within the empirical paradigm of Industrial Psychology, empathy is considered as a heuristic aid to develop psychological hypotheses in order to explain a certain situation while independent evidence, in this case the selection data, must prove the hypothesis (Ter Laak, 2011).

can also be interpreted as a way out of bearing full responsibility for the not so easy task of formulating someone's lack of job suitability.

#### *-Fragment 40*

**Psychologist 9:** *I'm the manager now of a group of psychologists, and once in a while you indeed see people being mild in their scoring because they think; 'yes, that's very hard for this person. With this report he won't get through, so I won't be too harsh'. And we see some psychologists ... because the score can somewhat wobble. Then I think; 'okay, it's just your work, you have to be mainly rational. You don't help him if you're easy with your scores'. However, people are, most psychologists are ... women find that troublesome sometimes, and most psychologists really want to be a social worker and not a selection psychologist. So you notice that they're strongly focused on how they can help people and develop them, and those kinds of considerations, while you're only there to pick the best out.*

Although test psychologists are expected to take a detached attitude towards the selection process in order to safeguard neutrality, and to underline the starting-point that personnel selection is a fully objective process, as the expert in fragment 40 does, professional objectivity seems unlikely as the selection assessment results 'wobble'. Because psychometric technology is not perfect, the 'career counselor' focuses on positive assessment results and either overrules negative selection data or puts aside unfavorable data, allowing himself the satisfaction of his or her internal drive for empathy and helping others. Flaws in psychometric, leading to measurement errors and conflicting data, enables the 'career counselor' to be 'inclined to give people the benefit of the doubt' (psychologist 5) and to mainly stress the positive results. They provide the ideal type 'career counselors' with opportunities to effectuate their helping attitude towards candidates through the interpretation of assessment data in the candidate's favor, which the ideal type 'selection specialist' fundamentally disapproves. 'Career counselors' seem to warmly welcome psychometric flaws in their daily practice and gratefully use them to turn recommendations in favor of the candidate. The idea that personnel selection is a fully objective process is untenable according to the expert in fragment 40 since selection assessment results 'wobble,' allowing 'career counselors' the opportunity to effectuate their helping attitude and sympathy for the candidates, providing the ideal type the 'selection specialist' the opportunity to rationally combine assessment data in their own preferred ways, and giving the 'business partner' the chance to not transparently compromise his professional standards in order to optimally cater to the clients' interests. The expert in fragment 40 seems to reflect the perspective of 'selection specialists' and especially 'business partners' when he urges 'career counselors' (particularly female ones) to take the responsibility of selecting instead of helping, and belittles the tendency of giving candidates the benefit of the doubt because psychometric results cannot be dismissed and a mismatch is not in the

client's nor the candidate's interest. In his eyes, 'career counselors' must develop professionalism and accept the fact that institutionalized selecting unavoidably provides power over other people, and that the tendency to intentionally minimize one's responsibility when making selection recommendations is a self-chosen limitation in power, while personnel selection actually demands a clear, although fair, attitude. Although flaws in psychometrics offer 'career counselors' some opportunities to avoid definitive negative selection advice (which is 'very unpleasant' (psychologist 13) and harmful to candidates), they do not go against science--even when they are in no position to help the candidate or realize that they cannot live up to the morality of clinical workers, which has a depressing effect on their professionalism.

#### ■ Review

The 'career counselor' is the first of the presented ideal types who proactively relates with job applicants by expressing a helping attitude and mainly focusing on possibilities to safeguard the wellbeing of job candidates in a fitting future job. In contrast to 'business partners' (who are more inclined to suspect job candidates of being double-tongued) and 'selection specialists' (who because of their great belief in objective test results are inclined to ignore the arguments of disagreeing candidates), 'career counselors' value the opinions of candidates. To give validity to the psychometric data, 'career counselors' display an empathic, helpful attitude to assumingly diminish possible cheating and to stimulate the co-operation of the candidate. The recognition of the job candidate as an explicit consolidator or mirror of the validity and reliability of the selection recommendation resembles the 'business partners' respect for the client's opinion as a compass for their actions; while ideal type 'selection specialists' restrict themselves to a dutiful adherence to the theoretical paradigm without opening up to the opinions of others. Personnel selection is considered successful when job candidates agree with the 'career counselor' that their competencies and personal motives enable them to satisfactorily fulfill future job requirements, or when job candidates accept and understand a considered and unavoidable rejection.

#### *Coaching*

For 'career counselors', who accidentally started a career in personnel selection assessments due to a poor labor market in psychology or exclusion from expensive clinical post academic training, personnel selection is a balancing act in which their sense of morality is not easily lived up to since the work in a selection agency--where empathy for candidates is not likely understood--must go on as personnel selection remains in essence an affirmation that job applicants fulfill certain job criteria. Therefore, 'career counselors' wish not conform to the role of the neutral observer who bases decisions purely on empirical-statistical grounds (as society calls for objective job allocations

that are based on the ascertained mastery of certain competencies by applicants) and to broaden the task of the personnel selection psychologist into career guidance does not seem to transcend what Boyatzis, Smith and Beveridge (2012) call 'coaching for compliance'. In a selection context where 'real' contact is less feasible, the helpful actions and intimate or informal communication in order to increase frankness by 'career counselor's mask what Costas (2012) calls 'normative control' over the candidate. However motivating 'real' contact with candidates is for the 'career counselor' making him or her feel like they are discussing real-life issues, the unequal power relationship between the expert and the candidate interferes in practice, turning an expert's empathy into insistency. A climate of friendly cooperation may be a motivating aspect of their job, but 'career counselors' seem less aware of the fact that addressing candidates personally on the basis of collecting data can be threatening for them and may actually not reduce but increase impression management. Real and intimate contact with job candidates, who are stimulated in an empathic atmosphere to reveal their true selves, seems untenable in situations of far-reaching selection decisions. As transcending every day small talk, stimulating for the 'career counselor', can be an unnerving experience for the candidate, one can wonder if the combination of selection and coaching is as equally attractive for candidates as it is for the expert. Furthermore, the wish to connect with candidates can turn paternalistic when 'career counselors' go beyond helping people to get a job and unilaterally patronizingly edit candidates' statements, or make negative selection decisions based on the unproved assumption that they help candidates. Despite the generally acknowledged practice of impression management in personnel selections since much is at stake for applicants, 'career counselors' do not seem to tone down the importance of 'truthful' contacts. Acting in the candidates' interests and applying own interpretations with the decisive context of personnel selection counteracts the image of the neutral observer and assessor which the 'career counselor', like the previous ideal types, imposes on the candidate. Despite his or her good intentions, the 'career counselor' creates a discrepancy between, on the one hand, informality and allowing the candidate to think about the consequences of the assessment results; and on the other hand, guarding the 'objective' selection decision which still has to be made by the expert only.

### *Selecting*

Like the 'selection specialist' and the 'business partner', 'career counselors' use the deficiencies of the psychometric paradigm to, in their case, implement their helpful attitude towards candidates. Enabled by the unavoidable flaws in psychometrics, the idealism of 'career counselors' involved in awarding applicants a wanted job tempts them to ignore lower scores, especially when assessment scores appear to be in conflict with each other, and to give candidates the benefit of the doubt. The 'career counselor'

tries to refrain from the role of neutral observer solely and searches for opportunities to display social care and humanity in the technocratic approach. Although 'career counselors' explicitly try to satisfy the candidate's needs, they trust their psychometric technology like 'selection specialists' do and finally base their selection advice on diagnostic results, drawing the line when helping goes against test results. The ambivalent attitude of 'career counselors' towards psychometric technology leads to faltering attempts to tone down the powerful forces of paradigm and business, compromising their helpful aspirations to look for opportunities to formulate open advice which will at least allow time and the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their motivation and later prove themselves. The candidate's acceptance of a selection recommendation has priority since 'career counselors' regret giving negative advice and negatively influencing or hampering other people's career aspirations. They hesitate to determine or condemn other people lives by offering, possibly wrong, negative selection advice and prefer to avoid this stressful responsibility. However, by such open recommendations, the 'career counselor' deliberately runs the risk of giving false positive selection advice to clients, whose interests are actually regarded as secondary to those of the candidates. Caught up in vertical accountability and a profound belief in psychometrics (Schillemans 2008, Roberts 1991), 'career counselors' moral aspirations and sincere empathy and willingness to help are satisfied by giving candidates the benefit of the doubt and postponing a selection decision to a later moment in time when the candidate is no longer under their wing. The disciplinary power context of personnel selection, the psychometric paradigm, and business entrusts the idealistic 'career counselor' to rationally and 'sensibly' decide in the end, regardless of the candidates' interests, and to remain the authoritative professional who must accept that the morality of helping candidates poorly fits the field of Industrial Psychology--where the interest of the subject is generally less appreciated or ignored.

The 'career counselors' basic drive to coach others and to be of value for them seems not highly appreciated in the restrictive classical context of personnel selection, where objective working processes of only a limited time dominate and the client's interests prevail over those of less powerful candidates. This context of classical selection assessments does not easily provide opportunities to actually support vulnerable or needy candidates who hope for a job, which can invoke feelings of sadness or ethical concerns for the 'career counselor'. The paradox of professionalism, this empathic ideal type is in, is a struggle to involve human interests in a technocratic profession with little means of openly expressing a desire to help. 'Career counselors' seem to have no other direct approach to implement their helpful attitude at their disposal. In a sense, 'career counselors' are (like the rejected candidates) victims of both the hierarchical psychometric paradigm and the power of the ordering and paying clients, and are only able to pursue their ambitions in secrecy. The two-folded role of coach and assessor for the

'career counselor's' ideal type has confusing effects on the professional identity and actions as clients still expect them to choose the best candidate, and their professional power to control another's career accessibility cannot be denied. Possible regrets about rejection is suppressed by the paternalistic argumentation that rejection of failing job candidates is only in their best interest. The impact of being trapped in vertical accountability on the individual expert are feelings of disappointment, a lack of efficacy in the absence of more direct tools, or shame when others ridicule their empathy --which supposedly stands in the way of business and science, and has to be hidden in the secrecy of the private assessment room. Coaching in a selection situation seems more about how the expert envisions the candidate than what the candidate needs. Therefore, in selection practices, even the ideal type the 'career counselor' fails to actually give 'the H in HRM' (Boyatzis et.al.), the warm and unpredictable face of humanity.

## 2.6 Jack of all trades

*The clubfooted man, proud of his work if not of himself, is the most dignified person we can become (Sennett, 2008:296)<sup>92</sup>.*

The 'Jack of all trades' is presented as the last ideal type in this study who does not like the other types settle for a specific focus on science, clients or candidates; but aims rather at a synthesis of these three perspectives in reaction to an expected shortage of personnel on the employment market. Although the core business of personnel selection psychology remains making selection decisions, the 'Jack of all trades' prefers to make them together with the client and candidate in a three-sided dialogue. The ideal type the 'Jack of all trades' not only internalizes the dominant paradigm of test psychology as his professional standard of quality; he also incorporates the at times conflicting needs of the commercial objectives of organizations and the personal interests of workers, integrating these three perspectives through the connecting concepts of 'enthusiasm', 'energy' or the 'inspiration' of candidates. Based on the ideas of 'coaching with compassion' derived from positive psychology, the 'new assessments' of the 'Jack of all trades' focus on enlarging energy resources for individuals as this is assumed to be effective<sup>93</sup> (Boyatzis, Smith & Beveridge, 2012); 'an inspired worker performs better' and a good career match keeps the 'stress-energy' in balance in the long-term (psychologist 12), so candidates more easily avoid work that costs them too much energy. The focus of diagnostics is on the collective object of 'inspiration', which is supposedly good for the candidate as well for the client since it is assumed that an energetic worker produces better and longer. Trained at university in mainly Organizational Psychology with the intention of starting a career in business, the 'Jack of all trades' follows additional training in individual coaching like 'solution oriented psycho-therapy' (psychologist 12) in order to be better equipped to diagnose and to intervene in work and organizations, with the intention of guiding and advising personnel and the employer for a longer period of time. In the Netherlands, organizations are legally required to improve their working conditions (Overheid, 1999) and therefore associate with an occupational health and safety service agency, one that is preferably accessible nearby 'so people [candidates] don't have to travel for two hours before they're back in the office' (psychologist 12), in which the 'Jack of all trades' conducts for career guidance services aiming at the for client and candidate relevant prevention of sick leave as a result of a mismatch between worker and job.

<sup>92</sup> Hephaistos is the god of the flung art and subterranean fire, the least privileged amongst the gods, and the only one who works. He is depicted with a clubfoot (Dros, 2004).

<sup>93</sup> Coaching with compassion will create positive emotions and healthy psychophysiological systems, helping a person become more open to new possibilities, grow, and renew themselves. Compassion involves noticing another's needs, empathizing, and acting to enhance their well-being and to help them to develop and remove pain (Boyatzis, Smith & Beveridge, 2012).

## ■ Pursuit of dialogue

### -Fragment 41

**Psychologist 13:** *The future will probably be totally different, labor market wise, erm, erm, when the baby boom generation<sup>94</sup> will be gone than, erm, there's a big chance that there'll be shortness in the labor market (sighs). And then the situation will not be that there're all sorts of people lining up for a certain job and that you can release an assessment and say 'well, this one is the best, we take him' (sighs).*

The expert in fragment 41 refers to expected developments in the labor market that seem to favor a selection perspective which integrates the interests of job applicants in the selection process more than is generally done in test psychology now, since in their opinion scarcity will increase not only the value of candidates for the employer. Experts anticipate the decline of selection assessments (Vertommen, Ter Laak & Bijttebier, 2002) with the development of a new version of assessments; 'I think you'll clearly see a shift of accent from selection assessments, are people suitable or not for jobs, towards; are people suitable for a certain career or fit a number of core qualities of an organization' (psychologist 15). These assessments differ from classical selections by a focus on potential and development--which gives more credit to the decreased number of job applicants--instead of on direct suitability. The sighs of the expert in fragment 41 seem to emphasize the challenge in which test psychologists will be placed if the labor market should indeed convert and traditional selection assessments turn into developmental assessments due to an expected shortage of skilled, employable, and productive personnel questions. On the one hand, 'Jack of all trades' still thinks along the lines of business development in order to satisfy the interests of clients who brought them in in the first place when performing new 'sustainable' assessments. On the other hand, 'Jack of all trades' must focus on candidates and their 'enthusiasm' for certain work, wherein lies the assumed key for organizational success. In the new assessments, the 'Jack of all trades', like the 'business partner', still has to account for client's interests, yet also has to deal with a less passive role of job applicants in the selection process. The new assessments are characterized by a horizontal strategy in which candidates are treated more like autonomic subjects (Bloemen 2007, Hofstee 2001). Future forecasts reflect a need to redefine the professional identity and activities of the test psychologist in order to handle the task to bind high potentials as they become shorter in supply for organizations. A focus on suitability that is replaced by a focus on personal values and motives may have been opportune in the classic selection situation; but according to the 'Jack of all trades,' this is definitely not the case in the new labor market circumstances.

<sup>94</sup> Baby boom is a demographical term for the strong increase in birth in the year 1945 to 1955 after the end of World War II (Bontekoning, 2012).

### -Fragment 42

**Interviewer:** *Do you only use proved reliable and valid tests, like by the COTAN?*

**Psychologist 9:** *No, because actually a number of things play a role. Because the COTAN is very severe and there are few tests that are really approved by the COTAN on all criteria. For selection work, you must have very good tests. In career work, it's only input for a conversation. These are actually more or less points of departure.*

Psychometric requirements for psychological measurement instruments are generally considered less strict for coaching in the assumption that the essence of diagnostics lays in the discussion afterwards, in which candidates are invited to add personal meaning to the various results (Luken, 1995). Since the opinion of candidates in classic selection assessments is generally regarded as un-'truthful' and in their own interests, experts have to rely in practice strongly on the validity and reliability of the psychological instruments, which partially appear to be misleading (as we saw in Chapters 2.2 and 2.3). Since valid and reliable psychological tests and assessment techniques have less priority in the activity of career coaching and guiding people into suitable work, the 'Jack of all trades' is less dependent on the quality of the applied assessment instruments and 'some type of test' (psychologist 13). The expert in fragment 42 states that even professionally unapproved psychological measurement instruments satisfy the purpose of career coaching, since it is not the test but the assessee who ultimately determines the validity or personal meaning of the assessment data.

In the eyes of the 'Jack of all trades', candidates have a right to know the results of the selection assessment not only because this is legally required and experts are forced to conform to the code of conduct of their professional association, but because it is considered essential for the selection process. Without the real involvement and consent of the candidate, the final outcome of the selection process will not only become useless for the client but also for the candidate to whom the 'Jack of all trades' feels morally obliged to guide (just like the helping 'career counselor'). According to the 'Jack of all trades', 'when a candidate indicates that he doesn't recognize himself [in the results] something went wrong along the way' (psychologist 16), since results must not be dictated by the assessment instruments but constructed in consultation with the candidate. Even when candidates disagree with the results, that finding can be used to draw a picture of the candidate, and by querying candidates in order to uncover the personal meaning of the acquired data, the 'Jack of all trades' seems to preempt at least partly the problem of impression management that selection creates. In order to achieve meaningful data, test results are used to provoke fuller discussion so that the 'Jack of all trades' starts a conversation with job candidates about their behavior and traits as they are shown in the assessment, where they stem from and what motivates them in order to define their growth possibilities and career motivation. In contrast to

the other ideal types, the 'Jack of all trades' applies selection tools rather as sense making devices and tries to construct a coherent and meaningful story in dialogue with the candidate in order to support the candidate and client in further career steps. Even when psychometric technology would fully function in delivering results on which the expert could fully rely and make an 'objective' decision, the 'Jack of all trades' still prefers to submit and discuss assessment results with candidates in order to explore their meaning for the central parts of people's lives and their power to inspire. The 'Jack of all trades' searches for careers for candidates where they are not only able to cope but can optimally blossom, meaning that their attention shifts from objective intelligence testing in the assessments to (from their perspective) more fruitful personality testing, so that 'every psychologist would prefer to administer three personality tests and two intelligence tests, but sometimes one [intelligence test] is also enough' (psychologist 12). Although most clients tend to consider intelligence testing 'needless' anyway, the 'Jack of all trades' sticks to a limited version since 'in the end you don't see intelligence and has been up till now always the best predictor; if you have to work above your standard, you'll get exhausted and the match will not work.' In addition, the 'Jack of all trades' wants to assess someone's ability for learning and self-reflection by asking assesses what they learned at the end of the assessment day and urging candidates to ask themselves 'can I learn it, do I want it, and can it be done here?' (psychologist 12) since clients only benefit from a motivated match. In the expert's search for this 'narrative truth', an increased amount of transparency in the selection process and its results is offered to job applicants; also, a sense of coherence is strived for by clinical, idiographic formulation in contrast to the classical search for the 'historical truth' with statistical, nomothetic methods (De Goede & Ter Laak, 2005).

Obviously, the open way of dealing with assessment data by the ideal type 'Jack of all trades' is in conflict with the supposed neutral and objective attitude of test psychologists in data collection in psychometrics. Despite what is stated in handbooks for test psychology, in the post-modernistic eyes of the 'Jack of all trades,' the pursuit of objectivity is not only unrealistic (since client and candidate continuously influence the selection process) but also undesirable because adding meaning and explication are exactly what the 'Jack of all trades' wants to attain. Although the relationship between the 'Jack of all trades' and classic psychometric science seems more informal, it is still there; however, in their pursuit of finding sources of 'inspiration' and 'energy,' the narrative of the candidate is given priority above solid test results. The 'Jack of all trades' puts great effort into diagnostics but watches for the pitfall of 'selection specialists' who make themselves 'a picture of someone' that 'is rather a puzzle' (psychologist 15), and which is certainly not in cooperation with the candidate.

### -Fragment 43

**Psychologist 7:** *I can tell something from the past; a reorganization. They play it clever to rename the job. Everybody's thrown out in a way of speaking and then you may apply for your own job. In the end the purpose is that, erm, one-third or one-fourth will not make it. In such a situation you get the feeling 'to what extent is it ethical to cooperate'? Because people who worked there for thirty years, they know them of course very well. Then it's idiotic, that's what I always say, that an assessment of one day yields a more substantial judgment. That's of course total nonsense. Dirty games are played, also at the highest level, and selection agencies are also used for that. You're only used to downsize such an organization, when one-third has to be eliminated without indiscrimination. Then you're used by the client and when that's not required anymore, he'll drop you like an old shoe.*

The name 'Industrial psychology' highlights the close relationship between selection professionals and the trade and industry that calls upon experts when organizations need their expertise in job allocation. The reality of the independence of professionals in this association proves to be different since the unprofessional expectations of clients are much harder to resist when employers intend to end psychologist' services. The expert in fragment 43 reports to be misused by the client's directives and expresses his frustration and impotence in dealing with unwanted or unrealistic client demands as the test psychologist seems to lose one way or the other; if he refuses to take responsibility for tough decisions or to be used as the messenger of bad news for internal candidates whose performances are in his perspective actually more effectively assessed by previous work performances, he misses out on potential income; if he accepts the assignment, he faces psychometric technology which can hardly add anything valuable and he will very likely not be hired again. The ideal types the 'business partner' and 'career counselor' seem similarly caught up between inadequate professional instruments, economic interests, and ethics, and are easily forced or seduced to compromise professional and moral standards. Although the future of the combination of career selection and guidance is still uncertain and unproven--which makes the 'Jack of all trades' the most fictional of the ideal types presented in this study--it seems to them a promising market as one respondent expects that 'maybe every worker' (psychologist 13) will be coached in organizations' to attempt bonding and to get the best out of them. The new assessments by the 'Jack of all trades' hold the promise that interaction is governed by a consensual norm leading to a better understanding between candidate, client and expert. In sustainable assessments, the career advice is supposed to be a co-production between the job (or more precise career) candidate, client and expert-in which the client provides boundary conditions 'so you've to know the organization and the job very well' (psychologist 15), and the psychologist explores together with the candidate how the candidate's personality, motivation and qualities fit the organi-

zation the candidate is applying for<sup>95</sup>. While with classic selections, professionals are assigned to perform the ungrateful task of discharging personnel which clients prefer to avoid doing themselves, in the co-production of the 'new assessment' the 'Jack of all trades' safely assumes that clients increasingly respect and value the test psychologist as a mediator between them and the personnel they need whereupon the 'Jack of all trades' can show a more independent attitude towards clients and does not 'let them [clients] manipulate you towards a wanted outcome' (psychologist 13). Due to the expected developments in the labour market which makes clients need enduring and productive personnel, the 'Jack of all trades' expects to profit from a more equal relationship between organizations and job applicants in which he or she is more independently positioned as their mediator.

#### *-Fragment 44*

**Psychologist 16:** *In our assessment, we try to ask real questions. Like what do you want to learn today, what is most important for you today? Because we always get of course a packet with requirements by the client, but I consider it truly more interesting to see what the candidate really wants to draw out of it.*

New assessments' anticipate a shortage in the labor market which will supposedly increase the inherent value of candidates. who will be more allowed to influence the outcome of the career matching process and will therefore ask for a more attentive attitude from the test psychologist. Although the expert in fragment 44 feels obliged towards the client, she "truly" takes responsibility for serving the interests of candidates in a way the client is probably not even aware of. In the professional approach of the 'Jack of all trades', the interests of candidates are not overpowered by psychometric principles (as with the 'selection specialists') or the needs of clients (as with the 'business partner'). The quality of the career assessment is equally determined by the extent to which the candidate 'has a certain insight' and self-knowledge but also 'has a nice day' (psychologist 16), which refers to the for this ideal type central value of inspiration. To create the right atmosphere and to stimulate positive feelings with candidates, one agency sends an sms to candidates the day before the selection assessment to 'wish them luck and a good night's sleep' hoping that candidates do not experience the assessment as a necessary evil but rather as 'a thankful experience' of which candidates tell their friends afterwards 'well, I did not get that job, but I experienced something

<sup>95</sup> The service provider shall encourage the client [job candidate] to collaborate in the identification of the possible significant outcomes and consequences of the assessment process, together with the risks and utilities associated with it. When appropriate and feasible, the service provider shall collaborate with the client in determining how best to respond to such outcomes and consequences (Definition anticipating outcomes and consequences (ISO 10667-2, 2011).

cool' as the selection assessment outlines 'a 'real development path' (psychologist 12). Both parties, client and candidate, are equally important for 'Jack of all trades' since he or she assumes that when people should be employed where they fit best, they are more productive and will report less sick leave, and that 'the client wants such a worker, of course' (psychologist 12).

#### ■ Syntheses in practice

##### *-Fragment 45*

**Interviewer:** *How do you see the future of this occupation?*

**Psychologist 16:** *Well, erm, there are really strong erm, erm, developments in the economy, all the changes which happen, a few years ago the crisis and now also, you really have to be alert. And, erm, what was very strict before, erm, selection at the gate, organizations liked that very much. Nowadays, the development of people is looked at much more, and organizations also see that the development of the person is important. Not just seeing 'if someone is suitable for the job'... We also like much more to look at the things a person is happy about, what makes someone energetic?*

Economic developments favor the helpful motives of those test psychologists who want to relate more with the candidate in order to find out what drives a person and how that fits organizations. For the expert in fragment 45, key concepts like 'happy', 'energetic' and 'enthusiastic' are regarded as more decisive for success in organizations than the competencies in the classic job profile as fabricated by the client alone, since career matching based on the new concepts is assumed to also prevent problems such as sick leave on the long term. However, 'Jack of all trades' wishes to be involved with candidates and career guidance while also doing justice to clients can be a challenging task. Clients are not only still mainly interested in the traditional assessment of the job suitability of applicants, as the expert in fragment 45 points out, but 'it takes more time because it's more difficult, especially when your agenda is fully booked' (psychologist 15). Furthermore, although 'coaching is a growing HRD-related area with a very bright future' (Ellinger & Kim, 2014) and is considered to have considerable potential for enhancing individual, team, and organizational learning and growth (Egan, & Hamli, 2014), it lacks theoretical framing and is relative immature. The 'Jack of all trades', who like the 'business partner' anticipates trends in employment and business, in this case by extending psychometrics into coaching, has little actual evidence for the effectiveness of this approach that seems to lack empirical research.

**-Fragment 46**

**Psychologist 13:** *What we work upon in this agency, we call it the new assessment. We just started it this year 2012, erm, and we work together much more with the candidate, erm, erm, yes; 'who are you? What are your qualities? And, erm, do you fit the organization you are applying for'? We look more for where we can start the dialog, erm, between the organization and the candidate. And the big difference is that the candidate himself also, erm, gets to see how such a final judgment is made. So it's much more a consultation than looking and judging. The candidate now, out of a sudden, receives a report in which all sorts of things he's done are written; but how people came to the conclusion, they don't know exactly. In the future, it'll become a lot more of a coproduction between the candidate and the psychologist.*

According to the expert in fragment 46, the new trend in test psychology are assessments in which professionals offer full transparency about their professional actions and decisions--not only at the end of the day, but also during the selection process in order to optimally connect with the candidate. The embracement of transparency by the 'Jack of all trades' increases not only the voice of candidates but also opportunities for them to judge the professional at work, to uncover shortcomings in the decision making process, and to call professionals to account for their actions. The offered transparency in assessment data and their possible consequences for a candidate's career seems to place the 'Jack of all trades' in a more vulnerable position than the other ideal types since candidates or clients can freely ask critical questions about the value of the assessment. However, as we saw in Chapter 2.1, the act of engaging (critical) candidates to add meaning to adverse assessment scores appears as an effective instrument in getting compliance and establishing professional power. Critics are easily refuted when candidates are partly responsible for the validity of assessment results which they are asked to determine themselves.

The expert in fragment 46 promisingly starts off to win a candidates' confidence through dialogue instead of the unilateral forming of an authoritarian judgment; however, power is still an issue in the 'new assessments'. Although candidate consent is essential and the expert in fragment 46 invites the assessee to join the dialogue, she draws the line in the final decision making and limits transparency for applicants in regards to them 'seeing how such a final judgment is made'. Since the perspective of selection is seen through the lens of employers who are in need of valuable personnel, it is not easily attainable to create a transparent and equal dialogue for the 'Jack of all trades' since the ultimate selection advice is in the hands of the professional. The 'Jack of all trades' puts in the effort of explaining where the results come from and asks the candidate for a reaction in order to widen the acceptance and meaning of assessment results, but can still decide to reject candidates for a certain job. Just like the 'career counselor', the 'Jack of all trades' is confronted to the fact that selection and coaching

are inherently incompatible in a personnel selection situation. The difference between the two ideal types is that while the 'career counselors' need to help the applicant turns out to be a burdensome responsibility when the selection advice occurs to be negative and shy away from their influence on the careers of others, the 'Jack of all trades' makes negative decisions and then actively searches with rejected (internal) candidates for a plausible opportunity outside the organization, like the respondents who is 'talking with them, looking for what should be realistic for them, what fits well, what would you like, what would be a next right step in your career?' (psychologist 13). This ideal type is not bothered with the hazard of conveying negative selection decisions to candidates as long as 'at any rate someone goes home with some output' (psychologist 12).

The 'Jack of all trades' empathizes with candidates and is willing to apply after-care by expounding and advising but is (like the other ideal types) convinced of the inevitability of a positive or negative recommendation. Through carefully querying and listening, a selection recommendation is constructed in mutual cooperation with the job applicant; however, 'scientific' standards for this approach are not available and 'we must still experience how it precisely, erm, will happen' (psychologist 13). Nevertheless, the 'Jack of all trades' considers him or herself as neutral professionals in an overall subjective process of creating meaning for the candidate and client; and when asked if there are troublesome work issues which keep the expert awake at night, one respondent answers 'no, I don't think so ... beautiful question by the way' (psychologist 12).

**-Fragment 47**

**Interviewer:** *How do you see the future of this profession?*

**Psychologist 9:** *Erm that I don't know very well. Yes, you've got agencies that state that heavy classical testing will be out. That, as a manner of speaking, some sort of professional with a white coat declares a recommendation about a candidate. That's what they consider as unequal. They see, gee, actually more a counselor or coach. You help them with their search for work, erm, yet I think that there'll be room left for the specialist, because you're specialized in test interpretation and you can't just leave that to everyone.*

Despite current developments in personnel selection towards a more independent candidate and career coaching, the expert in fragment 47 reacts by holding on to the established status of a clear professional identity in the well-established tradition of Industrial Psychology, which is dominated by a single paradigm that is unique in organizational studies (McCourt, 1999). He stresses the value of precise professional selection advice and refers with a touch of cynicism to those denoting the unequal power relationship between professional and layman, which in his eyes is unavoidable and inherent in exerting professional knowledge. He self-confidently operates in accordance with the psychometric paradigm and proudly acknowledges that not 'everyone'



is able to conduct the much needed and highly specialized work of test psychologists who 'can't tell everyone you're suitable, because not everyone is suitable' (psychologist 8), even if the employment market wishes it. Test psychologists equate the distinctive specialism of test psychologists with test interpretation as the domain of the knowing professional, and are apparently unwilling to resign the superior expertise of assessing and judging--like the respondent who looks upon the future as being 'rose colored, erm, in the sense that I think the need for assessing the qualities of people will remain in the future' (psychologist 15). Fragment 47 illustrates that although the new selection market will offer opportunities for change and challenges in the routine of test psychology, the expert expects 'objective' diagnostics to remain the 'scientific' core of her professional activity since you cannot 'leave that to everyone'.

#### ■ Review

While the 'selection specialist' is focussed on a strict adherence to psychometric rules in selection assessments, and the 'business partner' and 'career counselor' address either clients or candidates in their selection advice, the ideal type the 'Jack of all trades' tries to combine and intermediate the best of these three worlds; applicants, employers and science. 'Jack of all trades' performs as head hunter, mediator between clients and candidates, and career coach, which asks for extended social skills. The future seems promising for the 'Jack of all trades' who, awaiting suspected dramatic changes in the labor market, adapts personnel selection assessments beyond the immediate need of organizations for adequate personnel towards detecting employable work potential and avoiding workforce loss in the long term, however, the research results in this chapter show that professionals seem to meet some problems in practice.

#### *Candidate*

Of the ideal types presented in this study, the 'Jack of all trades' most overtly shows respect for the well-being of candidates, who are not regarded as some possible annoyance or source of bias, and makes use of their opinions since their cooperation is essential for the success of the matching process and their commitment to the new organization. In the eye of the 'Jack of all trades', the prospect of a labor market with an imminent lack of suitable personnel puts an end to the utility of traditional selection assessments where assessees are regarded as mainly passive subjects to be 'read,' placing job applicants in a more powerful position where they ask a tentative test psychologist to also incorporate their own interests into the selection process. The 'Jack of all trades' offers candidates full transparency in an attempt to uncover the candidate's 'inspiration', which is regarded as the key concept in the new labor market since experts believe that inspired and able applicants are the best candidates for employers because their 'energy balance' is kept intact in the long term, and this reduces possible outflow from

the job. As a result, of the in this study presented ideal types the 'Jack of all trades' offers candidates the most opportunities to influence the decision making process by explicitly inviting them to reveal their underlying motives and assign meaning and value to the assessment results and to commit themselves to it. For the first-time candidates in this study are seen as being highly needed and are given a decisive voice in the selection process which asks for a welcoming attitude and an open, intimate, non threatening and informal atmosphere in which candidates are invited to freely communicate about their strengths, weaknesses and motivations in order to supply experts with a truthful and complete picture that helps candidates and clients in the planning of 'sustainable' careers. However, despite all openness, in the end it is the expert who decides what the right job is for the candidate, whereupon even rejected (internal) candidates are actively coached by the 'Jack of all trades' towards a more fitting career outside the organization of the client. To do all this, the 'Jack of all trades' needs additional training in coaching which actually creates the reverse situation of non-psychologists who follow additional training in psychometrics in order to conduct 'scientific' selection assessments and lean on the professional status of test psychologists.

#### *Client*

Despite their non-authoritative attitude in the open relationship between expert and candidate, the 'Jack of all trades' succeed better in accepting full responsibility for more visible and decisively negative selection advice in comparison to the 'career counselor'. They primarily operate in the interest of clients and incorporate their wishes to bond potentials in a scarce labor market to their own organization, which means that a good relationship with clients is essential and the final conclusion about job suitability cannot be avoided (which remains the responsibility of the expert). The empathy of 'Jack of all trades' seems primarily externally motivated by trends in business since the valuable applicants will probably return to the agency in the future when they are treated decently. The quality of the outcome of the selection process is more than satisfactory career advice; it is also the delivery of new auspicious employees to the needy client so both the candidates and the experts are allowed to add validity to the assessment results. The 'Jack of all trades' assumes that clients obviously profit from the outcome of transparent data-interpretation as the expert gains better insight of the candidates' motivation or 'inspiration' in order to advise the best fitting person to the client, and can also gently persuade valuable job candidates in a scarce labor market to commit themselves to a job or career in the ordering organization which is in need of high potentials.

Unlike that of the 'business partner', the 'Jack of all trades' assumes to have a more independent position in regards to clients since they are more powerful as clients are in

need of their professional diagnostics of the difficult to establish concept of 'inspiration' in order to maintain their workforce on the long term. The 'Jack of all trades' feels therefore less forced to sacrifice professional principles in an attempt to satisfy clients' demands, and actively persuades the client to transcend the straightforward selection assignment of simply determining a candidate's suitability (which organizations generally ask for) and to explore additional personal issues, like motivation and drive, that seem to matter more. When 'Jack of all trades' compromises the psychometric paradigm, it is on their own account and conviction, not because a business asks for it.

### *Science*

In their new élan that testifies to the idealism of psychology in helping workers and employers--who are needy in uncertain times of flexible organizations, scarce labor potential and high sick leave--the 'Jack of all trades' constructs a creative and ideographic account of the candidate. They differ from 'selection specialists' in the so called 'new assessments' by expressing the suitability of candidates not in on a clear overall number that results from the unbiased numerical processing of preferably valid intelligence testing, but rather by an explicitly inviting candidates to attach personal meaning or validity to especially extended personality testing data. The central concepts of 'inspiration' and motivation--shared concerns for both candidates and clients--are moreover constructed by discussion and career coaching, rather than being based on empirical based research or objective psychometrics. The ideal type the 'Jack of all trades' breaks with psychometric tradition by allowing assessees to impose meaning on the assessment results and making the truthfulness of hard data become less relevant. Although psychometrics are necessary to actuate the process of revealing candidates abilities and finding their basic drives, selection actions of the 'Jack of all trades' depend much less on the adequate application of psychometric technology and the actual examination of hard data than on discussing assessment data with candidates to uncover its meaning<sup>96</sup>. In contrast to the 'career counselor', the 'Jack of all trades', who is characterized by a two-faced relationship with candidates and clients, apparently does not get entangled in vertical accountability. Candidates' translate the relative importance of the quality of the psychometric data since its 'actual' validity is determined more by the individual candidate than empirical-statistical evidence.

However, the scientific standards for this process of sharing and adding meaning to assessment data are lacking, and empirical evidence for ascertaining the central concept of the 'inspiration' of the job applicant and their effects on work success is not available. Like with the 'selection specialist', professional standards for data integra-

tion actions lack, and intuition and subjectivity become a more central part of the selection process while business expects a neutral role in the selection process and 'objective' selection decisions to remain the task of test psychologists in the end. The approach of the 'Jack of all trades', lacking professional standards and appropriate technology, seems to not transcend the level of appealing narratives, and the signature of the individual psychologist underneath the selection report clearly attests to 'traces of the narrative of its making' (Sennett, 2008:258), degrading the professionalism of test psychology in its lack of 'objectivity'. The absence of standards reduces the 'Jack of all trades', trying to integrate the perspectives of science, clients and candidates to an idealistic professional operating without adequate 'scientific' evidence for job allocations in practice, and which name in a figure of speech refers to a person that is competent in many skills without being a master in one of them. Although the 'Jack of all trades' steer themselves to a position of reflecting with more distance on the classic way of selecting and associating with candidates and clients, their attempt to adapt professional working procedures is not yet substantiated which does not seem to trouble them much. 'Jack of all trades' hopes for and believes in a unification of the approaches of the other three ideal types in order to be able to adequately respond to the changing demands of the employment market, but is less guided by the professional standards of the psychometric paradigm and can therefore (for the time being) be labeled, like the 'business partner', as a less professional operating ideal type.

The 'Jack of all trades' is offered a comprehensive professional assignment in which transparency, coproduction, cooperation, coaching, imposing meaning, and reflection are the central aspects; they also must be able to spar and please the divergent interests of both candidate and client. All conditions for a prideful professional identity seems present, as the 'Jack of all trades' fulfills an essential task for clients and creates a win-win situation for candidates allowing him or her to act more autonomously and less forced to make compromises in their professional standards, and warranting 'professional' based guidance. However, the coaching skills that are essential as the 'Jack of all trades' is dependent for selection success on the willingness of the suitable candidates to commit themselves to the organization of clients, are the weak link for this type of expert who is not primarily trained in these skills. Although, the 'Jack of all trades' is less vulnerably dependent on the good will of clients he or she still lacks the prideful identity of an objective diagnostician or a skilled and respected professional coach.

<sup>96</sup> An apparatus fits when it judges individuals 'in their truth' (Hoskin, 1977:181).

## 2.7 Variety of professional practices

The starting point for exploring the variety of professional practices in test psychology, as described in Part Two, is that what unifies all respondents; working in the dominant psychometric paradigm of Industrial Psychology. Sennett's (2008:27) premise for craftsmanship (namely 'impersonal routines of quality' to make the craft independent of the individual expert<sup>97</sup>), seems to not be met in daily practice in personnel selection psychology--as has already become clear in the attitudes of test psychologists that were described in the introduction of this study, varying from compromises (Thomas), psychometric straightness (Julian), a refusal to accept tests as leading tools (Hannah), and statistical criticism (Oliver) to a lack of opinion (Kate). It appears that instead of following a protocolled step-by-step process to produce optimal decisions, experts have different definitions of what is considered 'effective' professional acting and apply selection decision making through ongoing practical deliberations in which they interactively examine candidates, and make selection decisions that are meaningfully consistent with each other and are in line with the demands and interests of candidates yet moreover clients. Exploring the variety of professional practices reveals a range of different approaches to personnel selection which can be placed on the following two continuums.

### *Objectivity versus subjectivity*

Test psychologists define the quality of selection decisions by the 'objectivity' of their recommendations but differ in how strict they adhere to the psychometric standards. It becomes clear that all have to add subjective observation, interviewing and individual reasoning to valid psychological tests in order to be able to complete their selection task, even though a combination of formal statistical methods and intuitive methods or personal opinions is strictly discordant with the societal and scholarly wish for objective selections. As subjectivity and possible faults in measurement are inescapable because of inadequate instruments and other psychometric flaws, experts have to deal with it in practice. This study shows a range of different reactions and approaches; some try to (and believe to successfully) overcome subjectivity by entrusting the compensating effect of their logical reasoning skills, others gratefully use subjectivity as a deliberate mean to please clients and to some lesser extent candidates, while some psychologists dutifully refrain from subjectivity and psychometric flaws to employ these in order to favor candidates in need of a job and do not give in to their impulse to help. On this continuum from objectivity to subjectivity, the described ideal types for the 'selection specialist' and 'career counselor' are opposite to the 'Jack of all trades' who produces unrecorded narratives around assessment data to trace and tie potentials to

organizations. The position of the 'business partner' on the continuum seems to depend on what the client wishes or demands as this ideal type is prepared to compromise professional standards to what best pleases clients. Although the daily practice of personnel selection psychologists seems to demand alternative and less 'scientifically' approved selection methods structural and feedback on their selection actions is structurally missing, respondents remain self-confident and show little distress or recognition of faults.

### *Client versus candidate*

The practice of personnel selection psychology is not only defined by its technocratic standards, but also by an effect by and on others. Some focus entirely on the psychometric quality of their selection decisions instead on personal interests of others and close their eyes to the moral issues of job allocation, some are eager to please the client and come up with a judgment about which candidate is the very best, while others would prefer to grant candidates the job. Both the ideal types 'selection specialist' and 'business partner' tend to overlook what happens with rejected candidates because of scientific shortsightedness or their eager to please clients. Assigned by organizations, psychologists are less inclined to include the interests of candidates, which leaves them in disarray as to how to react in the selection assessment and find out the specific perspective of their selector in order to increase their chances for a job or at least to get the benefit of the doubt. Test psychologists differ in the extent to which they actively involve clients and candidate in their decision making process; the range of actions varies from excluding the presumably biased introspections of the candidates as much as possible despite their perseverance (as with the ideal type the 'selection specialist' and the 'business partner') to actively inviting candidates to work together with the professional (as is described by the ideal type the 'career counselor' and especially the 'Jack of all trades'). The role of the employer varies from a dominant one in the decision-making process (the ideal type the 'business partner') to one that is largely ignored in order to remain 'objective' in the selections (as demonstrated in the presentation of the ideal types the 'selection specialist' and the 'career counselor'). The strongest contrast of how to include both candidates and employers in the selection process is found in independent and standardized selection actions which exclude both parties and which invite possible dissatisfaction ('selection specialists'), and the actions which welcome them to actively influence the selection process ('Jack of all trades')--for which flaws in psychometrics offer opportunities but can lead to possible decreased objectivity.

It seems that short term pragmatism in the rather isolated and busy daily reality of test psychologists is easier than having profound reflections on how to improve professionalism or to confront moral dilemmas. A lack of attention to power-related issues

<sup>97</sup> Sennett (2008:67) argues that it is difficult to say if it is the maker or the consumer who is the one to judge its quality or originality.

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and moral dilemmas concerning who gets the job and why stimulates test psychologists to mainly operate as gatekeepers of business in the guise of 'objective science.' Practices seem need-driven--revealing a professional power that takes forms varying from rational argumentation and economic exploitation to moral advice (Lemke, 2002). Conditions for allowing a broad variety of professional practices lie in a psychometric paradigm that seems to overvalue the available technology, to undervalue applicants who overtly or secretly disagree with assessment results or deliberately influence 'objective' test data and make it worthless, and to fail to have an assertive answer to the commercial interests of clients. The professionalism of test psychology obviously suffers from inconsistent and contradictory discourses by respondents who claim to operate within the same explicit psychometric paradigm of purely empirical-statistical based psychometric principles for objective personnel selection, which leads to the difficult and paradoxical situation of having to break with professional standards in order to be able to behave effectively.

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## Part 3 Discussion

As is seen in the number of personnel recruitment and selection agencies in the Netherlands, businesses seem to need trusted professionals to take care of personnel selection for their organizations. Test psychologists attentively fulfill their task as the gatekeepers of business and decide on the careers of others by applying scientific based selection instruments that are repeatedly proven by Industrial Psychology to be more reliable and predictive than 'unarmed' observations or evaluations. The technology of Industrial psychology claims to select the best applicants purely on the basis of their merits, avoiding subjectivity or unfairness in job allocations. Despite the honorable intentions of Industrial Psychology, this study shows that the daily professional conditions under which personnel selection psychologists operate appear far from optimal. A gap between paradigm and practice results in a disconcerting variety of practices (as is described in Part Two). However, this does not detain experts from conducting personnel selection judgments on a daily basis without many reservations and this study has supplied many possible answers to the central research question how personnel selection psychologists act in practice. A way to interpret this diversity of practices and conflicting opinions on how to use and interpret psychological test results and the data from other measurement instruments, on how to integrate selection data into a recommendation, and on how to relate to the interests of employers and applicants is to consider the state of craftsmanship in conducting these personnel selections. Analyzing the research data from the perspective on 'good' craftsmanship (defined by Sennett (2008) as the gradual learning of skills and the acceptance that responsibility lies with the expert instead of with technology, and as a horizontal accountability for others) shows that not all the criteria are fulfilled--with unpleasant consequences for the individual expert, and the craft as a whole.

### ■ Craftsmanship

Sennett (2008) argues that craftsman who are gradually skilled over a longer period of time, and who are driven by the impulse to do the job well, are rewarded for this by a calm pride as their skills mature<sup>98</sup>. This study shows that the criteria for a craftsman's dependency on skills is amply accomplished by especially those personnel selection psychologists who sincerely strive to deliver psychometric quality--as is described in Chapters 2.1 and 2.2, and found in the ideal types the 'selection specialist' and the 'career counselor'. While the explicitly scientific standards learned at university set the point of reference in personnel selection psychology, beginning psychologists start

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<sup>98</sup> Vocation is a sustaining narrative. A gradual accumulation of knowledge and skills and the growing conviction that one is meant to do this one particular thing in one's life (Sennett, 2008:263).

their job in relative ignorance and additional job training is necessary. Their need for extra learning trajectories can be partly explained by what Sennett (2008:261) calls a dialogue between 'form and material' with which all craftsmen have to deal. The 'form' or expertise of personnel selection is unchangingly extrapolated from empirical-statistical psychometric procedures and technology to ensure optimal objectivity and neutrality in professional actions. While the body of knowledge of selection psychology has been increasingly psychometrically refined and improved over the past several decades, it essentially remains the same; whereas the 'materials' with which test psychologists work--namely the job applicant and client--ask for unforeseen approaches for which the paradigm does not envision adequate standards--as is found in Chapters 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6. This dealing with the demands and needs of others in the selection process is not standardized and is vulnerable to individual professional variety; additionally, the expert explores and learns by trial and error in the long run, resulting in different outcomes, professional identities, and skills. Experience and seniority (generally highly valued in crafts<sup>99</sup>) are less appreciated in test psychology when they should lead to diverse deviations from the psychometric standard, which prefers the minimization of individual experts who interfere with the 'objectivity' of selection outcomes. Besides learning to deal with the interests of candidates and clients, extended training is needed to master the skill of the interpretation of assessment data from variable combinations of assessment instruments. Practice requires the use of less valid instruments; and (conflicting) data that does not seem to adequately speak for itself produces conditions for giving candidates (the 'career counselor') or clients (the 'business partner') the benefit of the doubt. For practitioners, the compelling paradigm of Industrial Psychology, which prescribes test psychologists to act as independent craftsmen who consume and follow the rule of objectivity, leaves little other choice than to experiment or intervene in secrecy, erasing the 'evidence of a work in progress' (Sennett, 2008:258) and presenting the professionals' work as being independent of themselves--as is illustrated by respondents who are inclined to prevailingly report perfect selection cases to the researcher. Escaping into the field of business strategy ('business partner') or counseling<sup>100</sup> ('Jack of all trades') offers little solution to the test psychologist, as the corresponding knowledge and confidence which comes with an adequate training in coaching or master in MBA is lacking (which makes craftsmanship even harder to attain).

<sup>99</sup> More experience should lead to more accuracy, since seniors are more open to oddities and particularities. The novice is more likely to be a formalist, working by the book rather rigidly and applying general rules to particular cases (Sennett, 2008:247).

<sup>100</sup> One wonders if test psychologists settle for directing the vaguely structured character of career counseling through the use of all sorts of personal issues since it was not their motive to start a career in test psychology. Changing the techniques to tackle practical dilemmas requires a renewed image of the positivistic field of test psychology that relies on proven 'objective' psychometrics, which is not easily accomplished as people prefer to return to 'previous convictions' (Brown & Stenner, 2009:3).

While the paradigm of Industrial Psychology pretends to offer a theoretical and perfect standardization of the quantification of human abilities and traits, the practicing expert has to invest enormous energy and time to keep the imperfections of every day working life going on. These investments lead to different types of expertise as indicated in the research data of Part Two. In order to reach a coherent picture of the candidate, the ideal type the 'selection specialist' becomes a master in logical and creative reasoning. The 'business partner' masters managing relationships with clients, 'career counselors' become skilled in manipulating the psychometric tools they are supposed to be using, while the ideal type the 'Jack of all trades' adds counseling skills to uncover essential data for selection. Although Sennett (2008:261) describes experts who deal with such distressing open ends as 'good' craftsmen entering the dialogue between 'form and material', it seems impossible for technocratic Industrial Psychology to accept the imperfections of its paradigm evoking unrecorded and subjective creativity in practice. Sennett's image of a not-yet expert who makes mistakes, stumbles into 'happy accidents,' and learns from them is a pertinent picture of the daily craft of personnel selection psychology; however, it is difficult to match this to the image of the test psychologist as an objective register of behavior<sup>101</sup>. The generally accepted idea that the heart of professionalism lies in reflective abilities (Sennett 2008, Schön 1983) seems to be at least an ambivalently lived up to criterion in the craft of test psychology, where psychometric technology is prominent despite its failures to encompass the whole expertise of the personnel selection process. Respondents are not explicit or self-conscious about actions that seriously conflict with their supposed neutral and objective professional identity. They are not very prepared to openly admit that their technology is imperfect and seem to trust in the psychometric results of their selection assessments as long as businesses hire them to administer 'scientific' personnel selection assessments and define their right to exist as a craft. Since professional skills are considered the heart of craftsmanship, as Sennett pleads, personnel selection psychologists lose their authority when putting energy in acquiring additional skills, in order to be able to compensate for psychometric shortcomings or to please clients and candidates as illustrated by the several ideal types and summarized in Chapter 2.7. Their professional paradoxes mainly reduce their psychometric authority and do not envision for the calm pride that is characteristic for 'good' craftsmanship. Experts who are not cautious in overruling psychometric data and still continue to present their personnel selection decisions as 'objective' science to candidates and clients with an unproved self-efficacy

<sup>101</sup> According to Sennett (2008:83-84), in good craftsmanship, both superior technology and 'the modestly humane' are combined into an individual piece of work with 'humbly' accepted distinctions and unavoidable 'irregularities, variations, flaws' which may give rise to creative problem solving and new findings. Instead of striving for unattainable or undesirable perfection, the professional should actively tackle opportunities for innovative problem solving and problem finding and not accept half hearted compromises.

and sense of doing right have a counteractive effect on problem solving and finding--which according to Sennett (2008) are the essential conditions for improving their expertise. As seen in Chapter 2.1, respondents allow little corrections or criticism by candidates, hardly communicate possible psychometric failures, do not dispute the image of the stereotypical 'ideal worker' (Forster & Wass, 2012) or the fairness of the by the client required criteria for applicants, and largely ignore the influence of situational forces on ability. The combination of an authoritative positivistic paradigm serving the societal wish for objective personnel selection with a lack of structural feedback in daily practice in which commercial interests and working under time pressure rule seems unfavorable for critical reflection.

The concept of expertise has evolved over the years from consultants with 'analytic powers that could be applied to any field', via experts who need 10,000 hours to 'know a great deal about something in particular', to the outwardly turned sociable expert in 'a strong professional community' bearing horizontal accountability (Sennett, 2008:246-247). However, in equalizing fairness of selection decisions with the administration of 'objective' selection assessments, the paradigm of Industrial Psychology seems to deny the everyday power relationships with business and candidates. As described in Chapter 2.1, test psychologists do not consider the key ethical issues of their profession and only vaguely realize that these moral dilemmas lay outside their paradigm. The professionalism of Industrial Psychology mainly encompasses improvements in psychometric technology that allow experts to increasingly rely on the validity and reliability of their selection assessments. Business generally asks for selection actions that are concentrated on the elite--ignoring the large mediocre group of less able but possible appropriate candidates who are in need of a satisfying job, overlooking job seekers who refuse to apply or let test psychologists have a say about their suitability, and offering little opportunity for social work. It is not encouraging that Industrial Psychology technology seems to largely ignore normative acting; science and commercial needs dominate, degrading test psychologists to helpers who operate as gatekeepers that screen 'unwanted' individuals, and blinding experts to the role of ethics and responsibility in their professional identity. The psychometric paradigm seems to fall short when it comes down to moral dilemmas in daily practice, however, before professionals can become normative craftsmen, as authors like Roberts (1996) plea, they must have an awareness of ethical dilemmas and the space to take decisions themselves. Although Sennett (2008) pleas for a public debate to decide about the value or morality of the products that a craft yields<sup>102</sup>, personnel selection psychologists are daily confronted with operating in a complex social and economical context

<sup>102</sup> People ought to decide which technologies should be encouraged and which should be repressed (Sennett, 2008:5).

where ethical issues (like who gets the job and why, what power the future employer has over the selection criteria and the psyche of the job applicant, and what one should do with rejected candidates) fall outside of the parameters of technology but remain part of their practice and seriously interfere with their supposed neutrality. The instrumental striving for seemingly unattainable psychometric perfection reduces the freedom of professional responsibility and horizontal accountability, producing not particularly transparent individual approaches and solutions in daily practices, and dividing and de-professionalizing the field of test psychology. On the other hand, it seems rather unrealistic and naïve to think that the central concept of reflective craftsmanship offers a way out when 'science' rules and is transformed into ideology or dogma (which can also be extrapolated to other professions).

Overall, moral and psychometric challenges in test psychology seem to lead to a confused instead of prideful craftsman and the development of lackluster skills. Slow skill learning in technocratic personnel selection does not seem to lead to balanced and proud professionals if skilling is about keeping work going on that is in contrast with the principles of the professional paradigm. In analyzing the variety of practices from the perspective of 'good' craftsmanship it can be concluded that, in contrast to what is expected, the very definition of mastery in test psychology actually deprives practitioners from their professionalism, which produces an upside down perspective on the craft.

#### ■ Possibility

Test psychology has been a technocratic and industrialized field from the beginning, facilitating psychologists to 'objectively' quantify behavior for practical purposes in which psychometric technology and standards are highly needed to converge the irregular actions and narratives of experts more objectively (which is regarded as the essential virtue of job allocations). Skills, which form the heart of craftsmanship, are generally repressed by an overall expanding technocratization (Sennett, 2008) or fragmentation of jobs (Braverman 1974), since the beneficial impact of gradual skill mastery on the development of a prideful professional identity is less achievable in craftsmanship where industrialisation and technology increasingly take over the tasks and responsibilities of the human expert. It is essentially the nature of their tools that determines the amount of space experts are permitted to apply their skilled professionalism--since, for example, a chisel in traditional craftsmanship offers more opportunities and choices for craft in comparison with a lathe that operates largely without the professional who is in less control (Lilley, Lightfoot & Amaral 2004). Of test psychologists' tools, the hard and scientific intelligence tests, in particular, distinguish personnel selection psychologists from other professionals without psychology masters, or

from career coaches in the field of personnel selection. Psychological tests<sup>103</sup> can be regarded as what Sennett (2008:200) calls 'fixed tools' that are fit for one purpose only: the assessment of intelligence or specific personality traits, which can be rather frustrating for professionals who are assigned to measure a wider range of competencies than the tests cover in practice. Psychological tests are not only 'fixed tools' that offer professionals little space for their own responsibility and choices, yet are also commercially owned by a small group of publishers or agencies who lock the professional knowledge to the tool instead of the professional--which contributes to a process of de-skilling and a loss of test psychologist autonomy or control in personnel selection, since consumers have little control over making alterations when tests do not optimally match the selection assignment. Professionals in test psychology generally do not possess adequate psychometric knowledge or technology to actually construct tests themselves, and run the risk of polishing or overlooking limits or deficiencies or let a pseudo-science of testing dominate. It would take practitioners an enormous investment to get re-skilled in test constructions that are competitive with those of larger operating test publishers and agencies. Not having control over their most characteristic tool, namely psychological tests, forces personnel selection psychologists to resort to less valid and reliable assessment assignments and interview techniques. These instruments seem to be applied as 'all-purpose tools' (Sennett, 2008:195) and are creatively used to solve the selection task since they measure competences that the more reliable and, particularly in the case of intelligence, valid tests fail. Although imperfect 'all-purpose tools' have the potential to allow professionals 'to explore deeper' (Sennett, 2008:199-200), stimulate imagination, expand competence, avoid boring and unsatisfying routines, and allow the purposeful 'power of conceptual thoughts' in professional labor (Braverman, 1974:32), as illustrated by the actions of the 'selection specialist' in Chapter 2.3, the psychometric tools of assessment assignments and interviews generally apply poorly to the criteria of 'replicability, quantification, and standardization' that are essential for the 'technocratic' paradigm of Industrial Psychology (Coon, 1993:766). Under the time and moral pressure of every day assignments, test psychologists informally try to perform repairs on their tools, ranging from adding interviews in order to acquire a personal picture of the candidate that test-results largely fail to provide, applying less valid and often more popular tests to satisfy a client's need, and favoring or not favoring the positive scores in conflicting data in order to please the client of help candidates (as seen with ideal types the 'career counselor' and 'business partner'). While the normal discourse in Industrial Psychology dictates the use of fixed

<sup>103</sup> As psychometric technology does not have adequate instruments for overall objective predictions and lacks directions for how to deal with moral demands and the candidates' and clients' interests, it can better be described by what Sennett (2008:85) defines as a 'mimicking' replicant rather than a 'perfect robot'.

and objective tools, craftsmanship and moral accountability are rarely found here and necessary additional interventions of test psychologists result in a decline in professional objectivity. Therefore, to make the profession of test psychology increasingly more 'scientific' by developing even more 'fixed' tools appears insufficient in regards to the inherent conflicting social system of bossy clients and needy job-applicants. An attempt is needed to break the spell or dogma of the 'neutral mirror image' (Roberts, 1996:41) in test psychology, which merely encourages redoubling the efforts to improve psychometrics to secure valid predictions; while this study shows that elaborate psychometric tools alone do not enable professionalism and do not bring the instrumental and moral dimension of accountability into relationship with each other.

A possible way out of the potentially choking paradox of professionalism personnel selection psychologists are in is to reflect further on critical moments in the craft of personnel selection in which the professional decides on the selection profile, the assessment battery and the advice. Firstly, in designing selection criteria, Industrial Psychology can look for perspectives beyond its discipline into the larger field of social and organizational studies (Watson, 2004) and show that psychology is not a value-free science but instead focuses on 'what it is to be a person' (Brown & Stenner, 2009)<sup>104</sup>. In a more humanist form of employment social science, ethics and craftsmanship--where the applicant, employer and psychologist meet in dialogue--moral accountability refers to the 'why' of personnel selection instead of the technology alone. When test psychology takes its relationships with commerce, organizations, and candidates more into account--where objectivity alone appears unattainable and even not even desirable--it can be better defined in whose interest its psychological expertise is. A constructive debate with other social disciplines helps to answer the question of the moral why of personnel selection psychology by changing the subject of personnel selection for example for the benefit of minority groups (women, immigrants, the disabled, homosexuals) in order to strengthen their position, or for the benefit of engaged or empathic managers instead of emotionally insensitive ones. By treating candidates more as people, focusing less on diagnoses and more on becoming, thinking in larger units of time, and granting candidates chances for the further development of their skills in organizations, test psychologists signatures underneath their selection reports become a more political act in the addressing of the desirability or appropriateness of selection criteria in the light of a fair distribution of employment. However, it can be questioned if this rethinking of the ambitions and goals of personnel selection will be accepted in the perseverant power structures of job allocations. Bending the techno-

<sup>104</sup> Brown and Stenner (2009:2) stress that psychology in general suffers from premature 'once-and-for-all explanations', following the example of natural sciences, which 'impedes rather than enhances our understanding' of humans in specific contexts.

cratic profession of test psychology into one that also takes moral consequences and people values, employment, and organizations into account would mean that test psychologists would regard their psychometric paradigm more as a 'proposal with weaknesses rather than a command' (Sennett, 2008:101). At least, the test psychologist should be better trained in approaching the commercial client to understand and discuss how realistic it is what they want. Secondly, in the construction of assessment batteries it is obviously not very sensible to constrain or reject the core paradigm of test psychology in order to be able to supply the expert with adequate selection instruments for valid predictions of success in labor performance. Possibilities for experimental research on the predictive and construct value of assessment instruments is much needed in practice, as structural feedback on selection decisions is lacking (see Chapter 2.2). In addition, test psychologists are in need of more autonomy and saying over their tools and professional knowledge. The craft of test psychology should involve a professional learning trajectory of applying tests in different contexts and amended for different people enabling the professional to transcend a pure standardized administration of tests. Thirdly, an increased ownership of improved psychometric instruments that are applicable for different target groups, carried out with an explicit 'why' for personnel selection, create conditions for the craft as a joint product of technology and the moral man that seems to better match the decision making requirements of every day practices. Craftsmanship can be enhanced when experts have an intensive dialogic relationship with persons applying for the job, which would also require another learning trajectory to extend the communication skills for pulling the essence of candidates out. Offering fuller transparency about their ideographic advice for each unique candidate--instead of offering the result of standardization--, backed as much as possible with the psychometric data embedded in moral considerations, tears test professionals out of their isolated and narcissistic positions and will fight the unprofessional fragmentation of practices. Of course, additional learning trajectories have financial consequences for the selection services for clients and organizations, but since they are expected to enable the psychologist to perform better it is in all stakeholders' interest, especially when only a few applicants are left to select. The above scenarios of what a test psychologist possibly might be would alleviate experts to proudly demand the price they are worth.

#### ■ Reflection

At the end of this thesis, I would like to return to the informal dinner as described in the introduction where fellow psychologists discussed their perspective on tests but actually talked in parallel lines without explicitly responding to each other. The same defensive attitudes can be found in the various ideal types, yet rather weaken than strengthen our positions as professionals. It is my hope that from the analyses of the research discourses the barriers between the outlined ideal types--as reinforced by dif-

ferent learning trajectories--are to some extent levelled whereupon a self-reflexive conversation becomes possible. It requires some resilience to reveal the dispiriting aspects about one's profession and to learn that the good intentions of the psychometric paradigm are insufficient to yield the intended objective and fair selection advice due to the complexity of the morality and the commercial power of practice. Following Sennett's concern about the collapse of professions and his plea for the significance of professional identity, my thesis modestly indicates the direction of the debate concerning my professional group. Although the classic statistical-clinical debate in diagnostics does not seem to play a troublesome role in daily practices since respondents in this study naturally and without much reflexivity combine both methods, the results of this combination are still presented as 'objective science'. The pursuit of objectivity and standardization, most clearly reflected by the use of 'fixed' psychological tests, seems to hold a way to incorporate a wider idea of craftsmanship in the field of Industrial Psychology. Tests alone are not sufficient to allow craftsmanship for personnel selection psychologists, who are equally in need of alternative assessment instruments that embrace complexity instead of reducing it, of acceptable selection criteria, of communication skills for meaningful relationships with clients and candidates, and of reasoning skills to combine all this into a valid and reliable selection advice.

Despite initial reservations on my part, the grounded theory approach as applied in the discourse analyses of this study—which is an essentially different from what is commonly used in Industrial Psychology--proved to be advantageous in revealing complex issues about how tools and knowledge of my profession are used in practice. This 10,000 hour research, build on the nature of craft and learning how to work, essentially changed my view on my own position as a selection psychologist that appears to be incompatible with the insight and skills I gained in doing qualitative research. Therefore, I must conclude that as long as we, test psychologists, do not seriously take account of what is actually going on in our practices, probably requiring another long and communal journey, both crafts--research and selecting--seem incompatible.



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## Samenvatting

Personeelselectie kan worden uitgevoerd door psychologen, op Nederlandse universiteiten voornamelijk opgeleid binnen een positivistisch wetenschappelijk denkkader, waarmee de selectiebureaus waar zij werkzaam zijn adverteren. Hun uitgangspunt voor personeelselectie wordt al verschillende decennia bepaald door de leidende principes van standaardisatie en objectiviteit van het psychometrische paradigma, wat een zeldzaam gegeven binnen de vaak van perspectief wisselende psychologische wetenschap. In deze studie wordt onderzocht op welke manier professionals in hun, tot nu toe weinig onderzochte, praktijk dit dominante theoretische paradigma toepassen. Hiervoor zijn personeelselectie psychologen uitgebreid geïnterviewd, waarna de transcripten zijn geanalyseerd volgens een 'grounded theory' benadering. Hoewel men zou verwachten dat een dominant paradigma voorziet in een eenduidige professionele identiteit, blijkt uit het onderzoek dat er in de praktijk verschillende, soms tegenstrijdige identiteiten en benaderingen van selectieonderzoeken worden gehanteerd. Deze kloof tussen paradigma en praktijk wordt geïllustreerd aan de hand van vier geconstrueerde 'ideaal types' die een scala aan motieven en handelingen inzichtelijk maken, wat een gangbare methodiek is binnen de interpretatieve sociologie.

Het eerste 'ideaal type' wordt gekenmerkt door een strikt rationele benadering van de selectie opdrachten. Hetgeen nauw aansluit bij het heersende psychometrische paradigma, maar blijkt tekort te schieten door een gebrek aan (controle over) valide meetinstrumenten en gestandaardiseerde voorschriften voor het combineren en interpreteren van de verzamelde data. Hoewel dit type professional gedwongen is om meer subjectieve methoden te gebruiken om tot een selectieadvies te kunnen komen, wat tegelijkertijd het werk uitdagender maakt, worden de resultaten ervan toch als objectief beschouwd en als zodanig aan opdrachtgevers en sollicitanten gepresenteerd. Het tweede 'ideaal type' gaat verder dan louter instrumenteel handelen door nadrukkelijk de belangen van de opdrachtgever bij het selectieonderzoek te betrekken. In het streven opdrachtgevers van dienst te zijn en te handelen als een externe functionaris voor hun HRM strategie, blijkt deze professional bereid concessies te doen aan de eigen professionele standaards op het gebied van het opstellen van het functieprofiel, de samenstelling en inperking van (dure) testbatterijen en het type selectieadvies hetgeen paradoxaal afbreuk aan zijn of haar professionalisme. Het derde 'ideaal type' is gericht op de belangen van de in het selectieproces kwetsbare sollicitant en zoekt heimelijk naar mogelijkheden die aanleiding kunnen geven tot het geven van een voordeel van de twijfel aan minder passende kandidaten. Omdat uiteindelijk de harde psychometrische resultaten de doorslag moeten blijven geven, blijkt de empathische, counselende houding van deze professional echter moeilijk haalbaar in praktijk van personeelselectie.

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ties. In een klimaat waar sollicitanten doorgaans weinig te zeggen hebben over het uiteindelijke selectieadvies, tracht het vierde 'ideaal type' de 'objectieve' wetenschap en de belangen van opdrachtgevers en sollicitanten te combineren. De sollicitant wordt uitgenodigd samen met de selecteur, die hiervoor een opleiding in noodzakelijke communicatie en coaching vaardigheden veelal mist, mee te denken over de betekenis van de onderzoeksresultaten, terwijl de uiteindelijke beslissing in handen van de psycholoog blijft die daarin vooral het belang van de opdrachtgever dient.

Voor alle vier 'ideaal types' geldt dat zij gedwongen zijn afstand te nemen van bepaalde professionele principes om zich te kunnen handhaven in de praktijk, wat hun professionaliteit in een paradoxale situatie brengt. Professionaliteit komt onder druk te staan, omdat richtlijnen ontbreken voor het werken onder commerciële druk, voor het aanvechten van irrealistische selectiewensen van opdrachtgevers en voor het benaderen van kandidaten die inventief proberen de intenties van het selectieonderzoek en de werkgever te doorzien. De, aansluitend op de universitaire opleiding, jarenlange opleiding in de selectiepraktijk blijkt noodzakelijk om te leren omgaan met deze kwesties, resulterend in conflicterende benaderingen en professionele identiteiten die het onderling begrip tussen de 'ideaal types' verkleint. Een op zichzelf teruggeworpen professional die tracht het selectieonderzoek wisselend naar de verwachtingen van theorie, opdrachtgever en/of sollicitant uit te voren, is een ongunstige voorwaarde voor professionaliteit van selectiepsychologen. Toch benoemen de respondenten in deze studie hun selectiepraktijken overwegend als instrumenteel en worden psychometrische tekortkomingen en morele dilemma's verzwegen, genegeerd of ontkend. Door meer te reflecteren op kritieke momenten in een werkproces, zoals het vaststellen van selectie-eisen, het samenstellen van een testbatterij en het komen tot een advies, kunnen volgens Sennett (2008) mogelijkheden worden gevonden de professionaliteit van selectiepsychologen te bevorderen. Personeel selectiepsychologen zouden gezamenlijk kunnen nadenken over de wenselijkheid van bepaalde selectie-eisen van opdrachtgevers, de haalbaarheid of wenselijkheid van objectiviteit in selectiebeslissingen, het verbreden van de toepasbaarheid van en controle over 'harde' meetinstrumenten in unieke situaties, meer openheid in het formuleren van adviezen en welke professionele vaardigheden nodig zijn om dit te realiseren. Incorporeren van de selectiecontext en een expliciet moreel perspectief voorkomt dat psychologie als sociale wetenschap gereduceerd wordt tot een technocratische discipline, die de essentie van wat het betekent het om mens te zijn over het hoofd ziet.



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## About the Autor

Twenty five years ago Jacqueline Rietveld entered the field of test psychology. After obtaining her master's degree in clinical psychology, she graduated with a post-master's degree in career psychology at the University of Amsterdam. After an appointment as test psychologist in several career advice centres in Amsterdam and Hoorn, she moved to Leeuwarden to join the Stenden University as a senior lecturer in career psychology. Having a professional career next to teaching is a valued feature of the staff of the bachelor program Human Resource Management. In the nineties Rietveld managed a commercial test agency connected to Stenden University and recently administers admission assessment of Dutch and international students. Throughout her career, she developed a special interest in the foundation and heuristics of psychological assessments, culminating in the research described in this thesis. During the larger part of her career she raised two daughters, one for a career in pharmacy and the other in equestrian management.



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The Netherlands

